



# THE LIVINGSTONES AT KOLOBENG 1847-1852

JANET WAGNER PARSONS

The Botswana Society and Pula Press



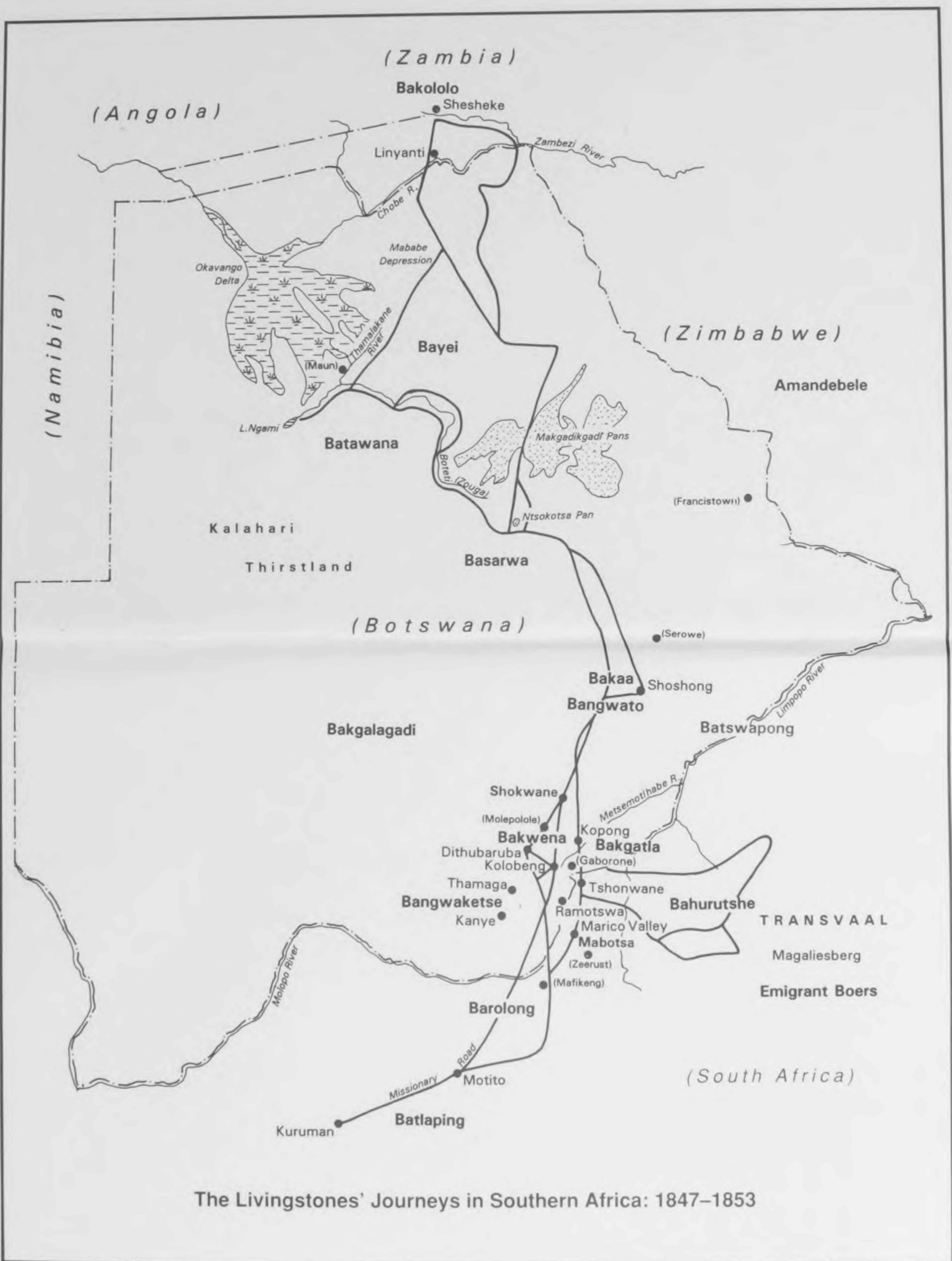
Janet Parsons was Fulbright Tutor in English at Lucknow University and completed a Master's Degree in International Education at Indiana University. She assisted in an American students' programme at the University of Ghana, initiated projects in Malawi and researched missionary-settler history in Botswana and Malawi, weaving many strands into a fabric of life in Africa.

In recent years, she has restored two national monuments in Malawi and published to promote historical preservation. She has raised two daughters and two sons in Africa and lives now in the countryside near Cambridge where she is an Associate in African Studies.



*Janet Wagner Parsons*





The Livingstones' Journeys in Southern Africa: 1847-1853



**The Livingstones  
at Kolobeng  
1847-1852**

**Janet Wagner Parsons**



**This book is for**

**Somerset** who, like Agnes,  
made playthings from the seedpods of Africa

**Cheyne** who, like Thomas,  
was born in a homestead in the far interior

**Arun** who, like Robert,  
climbed among the kloofs and boulders of Kolobeng, and

**Bryce Daniel** who, like "Zouga",  
appeared at the very end of the enterprise.





*The Livingstone family in 1857*



# **The Livingstones at Kolobeng**

**1847 - 1852**

**Janet Wagner Parsons**

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Historian Neil Parsons shared his knowledge of Livingstone to foster scholarship in me. Jeff Ramsay corrected my errors. Isaac Schapera, re-visiting Botswana in 1983, drew my attention to Livingstone's abandonment of the Bakwena. The late Michael Crowder brusquely insisted that I take a better approach to my write-up. David Kiyaga-Mulindwa persuaded me to examine the socialisation factor in Kwenya history. Kevin Shillington encouraged me to locate the Kolobeng town. Fred Morton knew so much about the Bangwaketse that he could instruct me on their Bakwena neighbours! Sheila Letswiti of the National Archives and Judith Drew of Surveys and Lands lent me their skills or extended my own. Jim Denbow carried out—just because I asked—the first excavation at Kolobeng.

At Kuruman in Cape Province, I found the Reverend Alan Butler—surely the spitting image of Moffat—restoring a window frame of camelthorn. His knowledge of early South African building methods promoted my mental reconstruction of Kolobeng. Physician Herman Bosmann helped me to diagnose Mary Livingstone's illnesses at an interval of a hundred-odd years. Malawi's Queen Elizabeth Hospital lent antiquarian medical texts to shed light on Livingstone's procedures. Margrete Sacranie of Blantyre deciphered the Dutch-Afrikaans of old Transvaal documents. Mariette van Velden in Malawi and Gillian Manning in the UK took pen and ink to bring to life my mental images of Kolobeng.

Dr Alfred Merriweather, after years of work at the Scottish Livingstone Hospital in Molepolole, contributed a unique insight into the unbroken Livingstone heritage in Botswana. Frances Ellenberger, widow of Vivien of the Protectorate, offered her memories of walking the Kolobeng site half a century before with Batswana who had been pupils of Mary Livingstone; descendants Esther Mulunga, Livingstone Kolozi and Edward Motsumanyane walked the site with me.

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## Preface

---

In developing an understanding of the Livingstones as a family, and of David before his major explorations, I have had the unusual advantage of residence in Botswana, where I studied what remains of the Livingstone mission. The opportunity to imagine the pioneering family in their environment has been invaluable. This study is an attempt to share my insights.

Of the many biographers of David Livingstone, and the only writer who focused on Mary, few can claim exposure to the arid heart of southern Africa. Few have shown more than the briefest interest in the Kolobeng period in the Livingstone history. The ruins of the mission, though always accessible, have attracted little attention.

I have always felt that the mission site, together with manuscripts and documents, held a story that could contribute a fuller understanding of the remarkable exploits of David Livingstone. This, indeed, is the story that has developed—of the man's relationship with his family and the land he farmed, of the experiences he gathered in Sechele's country that influenced him all his life, of the land and the people and the woman and children who shared their lives with him who attracted so much acclaim.

Biographers of Livingstone the explorer have tended to centre on the man's achievements, and to draw conclusions on his character from these. This study, simple and limited in scope, focuses on his early years in Africa to understand his character and motivations. The introductory chapter is brief, but the main body of the text incorporates much detail. Material previously overlooked or under-used has been carefully re-examined. Contextual material, sub-textual detail and nuance have been gleaned for insight. In some instances previous conclusions have been upheld, in others overturned in favour of a more accurate understanding of Livingstone, his family, the Bakwena to whom he preached and the significance of the Kolobeng years.

I began with the usual sources: Livingstone's Journal, his correspondence and the few letters still extant of Mary's, letters to and from relatives and friends and the published accounts of Livingstone's contemporaries. Relevant Bechuanaland Protectorate and South African Republic documents were located, as well as early photographs of the mission ruins. The site was measured, mapped and archaeologically examined. Kwenana informants were traced and interviewed for their oral history. In writing this, I am reminded of my disquiet in those interviews—of my sense that time was running out—I have now received word that Koloi (of Chapter Five and the Epilogue) has died.

The study eventually produced a narrative that reads rather like fiction. On the contrary, it is fact, as accurate as I could make it. The details of Livingstone's clothing, the accoutrements of the wilderness tea party, the exact circumstances that led to the death of Elizabeth, these have been pieced together from authentic, if scattered, historical records.

The Bididi rainmaker existed, his descriptive profile drawn after I saw a pen-and-ink likeness of a colleague in his calling. The description of household



effects left behind by the departing family was meticulously built up from Boer records of booty seized and travellers' descriptions of refuse sighted after the looting of the house. Thus the study offers accuracy within imagery and history rendered in what I consider to be an enlightened mode. Facts and interpretation are contextualised to provide not only information but the power to evoke time and setting.

My purpose has extended beyond compiling history in an unusual form, nevertheless. From the beginning, I have tried to create a stimulus for the preservation of what little remains at Kolobeng, and I am more convinced than ever that the mission site and the past it represents are significant to Botswana's national heritage.

The Kolobeng mission ruins have been a National Monument for fifty years and the object of serious neglect for most of that time. Remnants of the first church and permanent dwelling in the nation have received during most of this century less protection than they attracted in the first two decades, when an insolvent Protectorate Administration shared its meagre resources to secure the old mission's survival against the elements, and Sechele II assigned the ageing mission pupil Kgabo to be caretaker.

It was then, in 1916, that a young British corporal with a wagon and a roll of fencing wire set out on a journey of a day and a night to reach the ruins. Today any visitor can set out from Gaborone and arrive in a few minutes on a surfaced road, without driving through hub-deep sand as I did, and a project is underway to restore and promote the remnants at Kolobeng. A surprising number of visitors appear at the site each year, and I sincerely hope that they will always find there something to contemplate and remember.

JWP  
2 Setchell Close  
Graveley  
Cambridgeshire  
England  
March 1997



## **Note on Non-English Words and Spellings**

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Non-English words in the text are italicised. Notes are placed at the end. A glossary is provided. Orthography conforms with the recommendations of the Fourth Report of the Botswana Place Names Commission, except in quotations. There are two maps, on which place names are rendered in modern orthography, with some antique spellings provided in parentheses. Towns that developed after the period under study are also indicated with parentheses.

Livingstone's idiosyncratic spellings, for which he is well-known, are retained in quoted passages without notation. His surname appears with a final 'e' throughout. In David's early years his father spelled it without the 'e'; in 1855 he returned to the ancestral spelling with an 'e' and his son complied, giving rise to the spelling most used by recent historians and biographers.

## **Editorial Note**

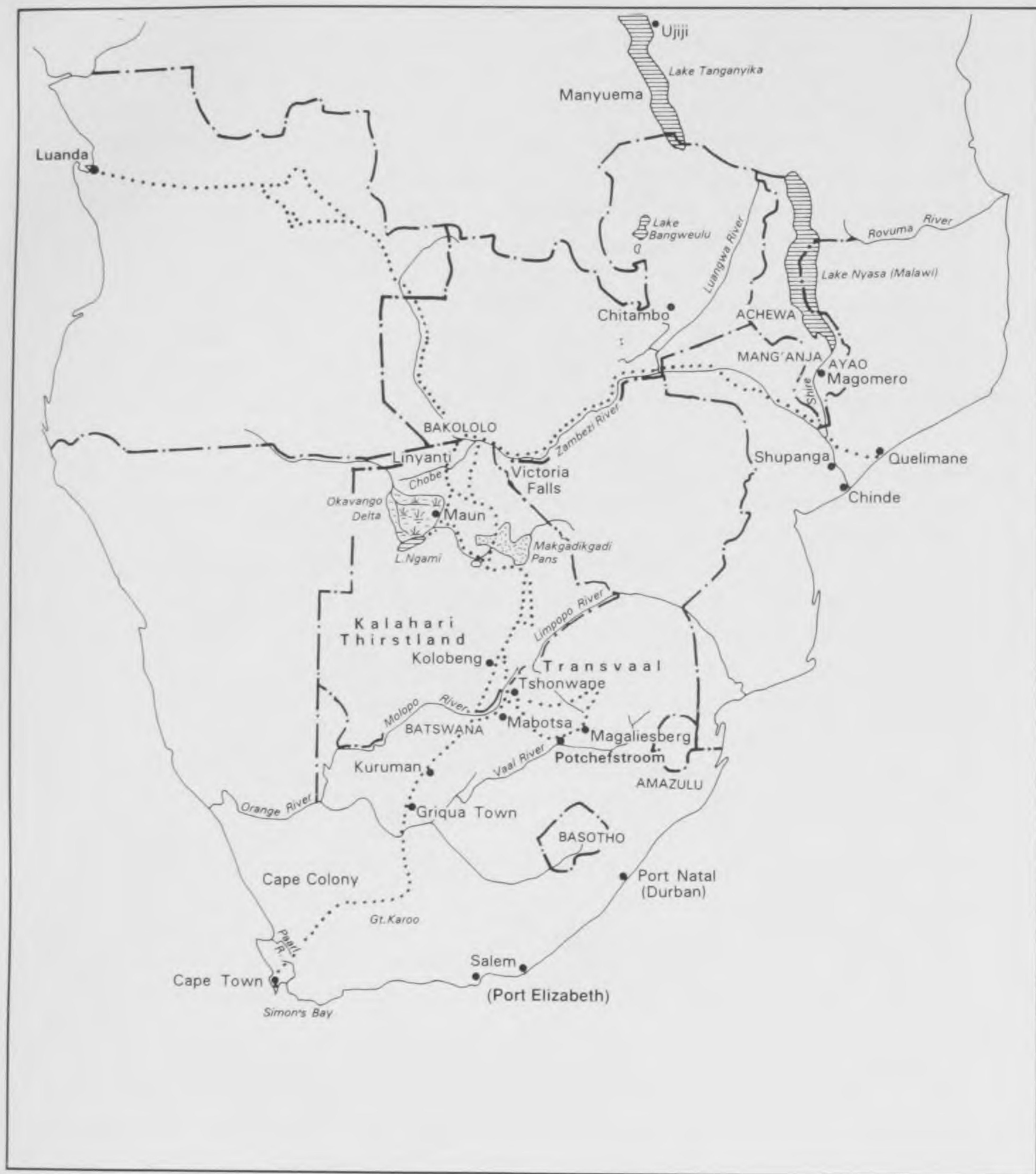
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Setswana tribal names are made up of a root and a prefix, the plural prefixes being either Ba- or Ma-. Tradition is clear as to which prefix is appropriate in any instance. Where the root is a tribal ancestor or a totem the prefix is Ba-, as in Bakwena, Bangwato, Batlhaping. Where the root is of a different origin, such as a place or a description the prefix is Ma-, as in Makgalagadi, Masarwa, Makololo.

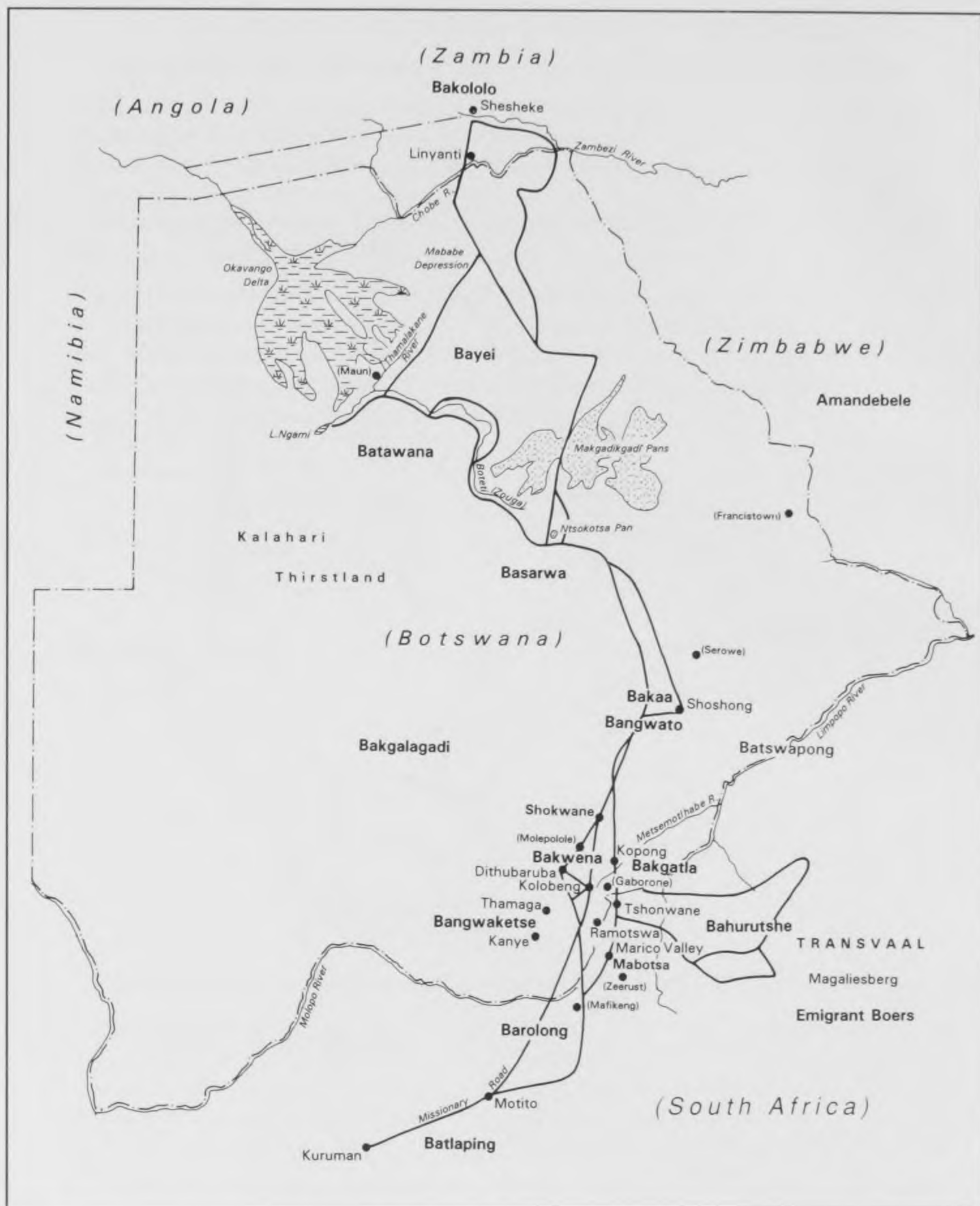
In recent years, however, sensitive people have read a derogatory inference in the Ma- prefix, perhaps derived from the relative power or status of the tribes concerned. In reaction to this the custom has grown up of giving every tribe a Ba- prefix, as in Bakgalagadi, Basarwa, Bakololo. The motivation is courtesy, but the application is questionable.

Nevertheless, language is the servant of culture, and it may be that the recent tendency will prevail on this issue. It seems to have the support of the media. Meanwhile the two practices exist side by side, and it will be noticed that this book reflects the modern usage.





*David Livingstone's journeys 1841-1856*



The Livingstones' journeys 1847-1853



## Introduction

---

In the Kweneng District of Botswana there is a hill with shallow soil and much loose rock, clothed with the ever-present thorn bushes of the Kalahari Thirstland. Below it is the Kolobeng River that is often dry in these years of drought. All that can be heard is the tinkling of a cowbell across the valley and the sweep of the incessant wind. There is one beauty in the place and that is peace, for there is no permanent dwelling, only the scattered huts of farmers who come to hoe and plant if there is rain. There are foundations on the hill though, giving evidence of Europeans who came long ago, built and struggled out an existence, but abandoned their trial of the place and only stones and the sun and wind remain.

In 1847 David Livingstone, the man who would walk from the Zambezi to the west coast and back to the east, describe the land, the river systems and the peoples of southern Africa and precipitate a century's European involvement in the little-known continent, arrived in an ox wagon with his family. He was a missionary, and he built a mission station at Kolobeng, the furthest outpost on the edge of the interior. His possessions were few, and the only skills of his hands were those that he acquired as he worked. He built a house and he built a rough, impermanent church of poles and mud that was the first to stand in the country of Botswana.

The life was hard. The family lived in a hut made of reeds for nearly a year before they made a better home of rough-hewn planks and earthen floors. They planted their crops on the river plain for three years in succession, but every year the plants withered and died. The children roamed the arid, lifeless hill from dawn to darkness, Robert, so thin that his limbs were like sticks; Agnes, full of laughter but pallid; Thomas, too young to brush the flies from his eyes.

The moistureless, dust-laden air brought sickness that took the life of their sister, Elizabeth, whom they buried at the foot of a mimosa tree at the base of the knoll. Their father marked the grave with a piece of timber and declared it "the first grave in all the country marked as the resting place of one of whom it is believed and confessed that she shall live again" (letter to his parents, 4 December 1850.)

The children were as immersed as their parents in the life of the people, and spoke little English. The attention they received met chiefly physical needs, for their mother was cook, candle maker, seamstress, baker and teacher of the Kweneng children, with little time left for her own. Their father, if not away, was occupied from morning to night with building, forging, woodworking, planting or preaching.

In the kitchen dooryard lies the stone bench where Livingstone, the *Ngaka*, is said to have treated wounds and abscesses, eye infections and pneumonia, and extracted decaying teeth, while his young son imitated every procedure. Somewhere on the flood plain below the hill an irrigation canal was dug by a hundred men and the missionary without benefit of a spade or a bucket. Yet, for all the toil and hardship there was only one convert, *Kgosi* Sechele, who narrowly escaped being murdered or cast out by his people.



The existence at the lonely outpost failed. The Bakwena, worn and hungry, gathered their meagre possessions and moved away. The family broke apart, Livingstone sending his family "home" to a Britain they did not know. He left the Bakwena and forsook settled existence to explore and open Africa—for the glory of God and destruction of the slave trade, he believed. They never had a home together again.

It is said that the screams of his dying infant haunted David Livingstone all the years of his life. The quiet Mary, highly capable in frontier living, could not endure life in the alien land, and was nearly deprived of her sanity. She received no word for as much as a year at a time of the welfare and whereabouts of her husband, while the enraptured public clamoured for news of his exploits. The children grew up without knowing their father or the home that he intended for them and never made.

The story of the Livingstones should be told adequately and in detail as it has never been told before. It is a tragedy. The homestead was doomed from the outset by the disasters of drought and Boer hostility, but equally by decisions taken by Livingstone himself. At Kolobeng he rejected the never-ending struggle to establish a mission, though he was a man of faith, abler than most and driven by a pioneering spirit. The utter drudgery of building, moving and building again wore him down, so that in the end it outweighed even the immense moral support and practical assistance he received from the Moffats at Kuruman.

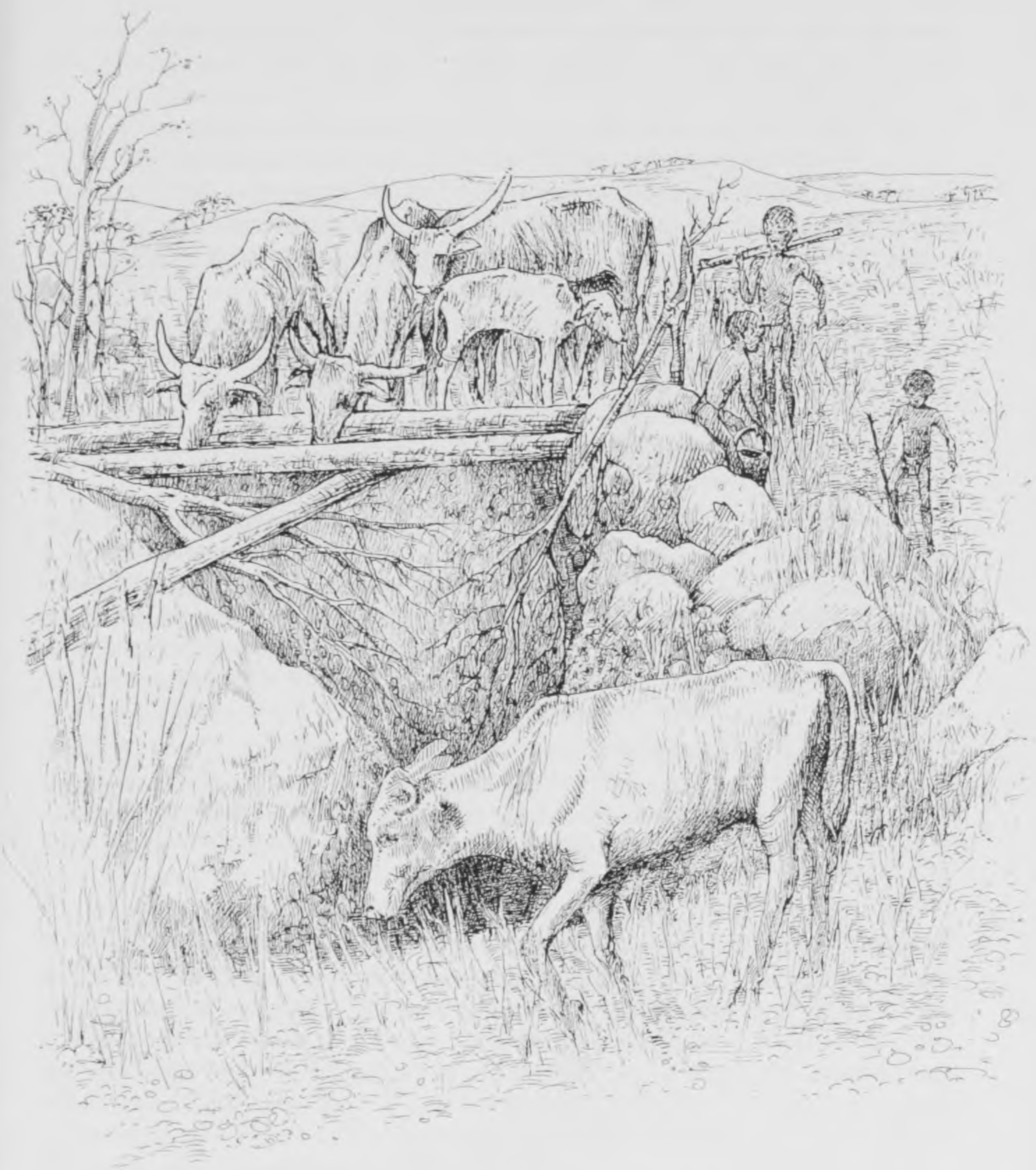
He failed in his associations with every missionary except Moffat because their vision fell short of his own, but equally because he simply could not get on with people. With determination and obstinacy he struck out for a unique and solitary achievement that earned him the adulation of the western world. Few have recognised, nevertheless, that his exploits were founded on failure, and his inability to co-operate with those of his own race extended to the Boers of the Transvaal.

During his years of struggle at Kolobeng he inadvertently undermined his own enterprise by encouraging the immigrant farmers of the Transvaal in their belief that the Bakwena were armed and dangerous. His balance of power policy gave way, however, and the Boers attacked the Bakwena with more provocation than he would admit. Yet the missionary bore excessive blame for providing his people with firearms, and the case against him for gun-running demands re-examination.

The Bakwena, in turn, have been blamed by some historians for ransacking their pastor's house. An injustice that began with the crimes of a Boer commando has been perpetuated against a people who guarded their pastor and his family with their lives, and their case too merits re-examination.

Even the quiet years before the crisis of destruction at Kolobeng demand scrutiny. While the scientific record of the man's early journeys from Kolobeng is well-known, his neglect of the mission and the dissolution that resulted are not. It has never been shown that the man who laboured under the burden of domestic responsibility also suffered a sense of failure that drove him even more resolutely into exploration.





*Cattle and herdboys at a waterhole*



What ultimately needs to be told—and the most surprising part of the tale—is that the complex man, when he finally rid himself of home and family and deserted his people, felt a remorse that altered him and contributed to his ceaseless, unfulfilled exploration. The achievements that earned him fame grew not entirely from a creative determination to move beyond others, but from the need to escape inadequacy as a husband, father, evangelist, and from a self-imposed penance of isolation.

This study seeks to show that Livingstone's unyielding nature, combined with the burden of his family's hardship, created a pivot for his decisions. The man's vision was so relentless that he would not compromise with his family's needs. When he could no longer leave them at Kolobeng or subject them to further expeditions he refused them the sanctuary of Kuruman. Mary Moffat had offended him, and his family paid the price.

The family he sent away never prospered or gained notice. Little has ever been known about Mary's hardships in England, where she waited, year after year, for the return of the husband whose ideals she had long since accepted, though they threatened her life. No cause and effect relationship has ever been drawn between her fulfilment in the early years at Kolobeng and the depth of her suffering in abandonment.

Modern writers, however, have criticised Livingstone's treatment of his family more than Mary Moffat ever maligned it. Yet historical perspective argues in Livingstone's favour. During the years of Kolobeng's existence as a mission a Victorian ideal prevailed that encouraged the wives of missionaries and their unsuspecting children to risk their lives, and encouraged others to do likewise, in support of the men who felt called in the service of Christ to evangelise "the heathen".

David Livingstone had a family, and his wife and children were never far from him in fact or thought, though history has treated him as if he walked alone through his odyssey in Africa. Mary, the children and the misfortunes that befell them demand acknowledgement and reflection. The seeds of their tragedy were sown at Kolobeng.

The Kwenā nation, unlike the Livingstones, prospered from the roots put down in the soil of the mission. The people garnered security and prosperity after their long years of hunger and fear, and the harvest was abundant. With a unique vision, Sechele turned the prestige and knowledge of the missionary to the long-term needs of his people. He adopted the religion and lifestyle of the outsider, gambled his life and his mandate, and won. Out of the havoc wreaked by the Boers at Dimawe he shaped a formidable sovereignty that contributed to the creation of the modern state of Botswana.

A part of the history of the Livingstones and the Batswana lies in the soil of Kolobeng, where the first Christian family in that country and the far interior lived and toiled with the people of Sechele. Much was determined by events of the Kolobeng years and by the man they called *moruti*—teacher.



# Chapter One

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## Preparations

*In the grounds of the Kuruman Mission visitors walk in the shade of sarynga trees planted by Robert Moffat in the years before Livingstone set foot on the continent of Africa. In the old stone church they marvel at the massive walls and beams which should last for many years to come. In the schoolhouse they see the recently restored press on which Moffat himself printed the Setswana Bible.*

*They find that the house of the Moffat family, which constantly accommodated missionary colleagues and various travellers, is no longer a residence. The room where Moffat wrote and translated is now the study of the director of the revived Kuruman Moffat Mission. Freed from the restrictions imposed by apartheid, the mission is now a centre for theological and related studies. Conference facilities already exist, and a library is soon to be built. However, as the mission applies itself to the challenges of these days visitors can still feel the atmosphere of the eighteen-twenties and sense the vision with which the enterprise was established.*

At Simon's Bay in the Cape Colony in 1841 a man disembarked unnoticed among a welter of traders and immigrants, a young doctor fresh from his training with a diploma in divinity and no obvious means. He loaded an ox wagon with all the provisions his modest salary would allow, and set out to walk beside the rocking, jolting conveyance for six hundred miles into the African interior.

This was David Livingstone at twenty-eight years of age. The young man would not emerge from the African bushveld for eleven years, when he would reappear like a refugee, disoriented, unused to towns, uncertain even in the society of people who had come to admire his exploits, and that would be only the beginning. These, then, were the early years, when he set out to trek across the windswept Karroo and ford the Orange River to Griqua Town and beyond. He was a missionary, and Robert Moffat's mission at Kuruman was his destination.

Kuruman, large and prosperous, was the pride of the London Missionary Society and its remotest outpost. Robert Moffat, a Scot of humble origins like himself, had built it two decades earlier among Tswana people settled in the vicinity of a spring called the Eye of the Kuruman. Trained as a gardener, Moffat had experienced an overwhelming longing to teach the word of God in Africa. He came with remarkable energy and a determination to try anything. His will had struck like flint on the untried land and he had succeeded.

During his years of building and preaching he had struggled with the complex task of translating the Bible into Setswana, and when his manuscript of the New Testament was ready he had embarked for England to oversee its printing, while he toured and gave speeches for the Society. Among his spellbound listeners, he met the young Livingstone, and encouraged him to go out to Africa—to his own mission where he would be of great use until he himself could return. It was



Livingstone's first encounter with the renowned Moffat, who would become his friend, advisor and father-in-law.

Livingstone was a man of medium height who seemed somehow taller. He was wiry and slight, but had more than the usual allowance of energy and an exceptional strength in his hands. His stamina on trek was so remarkable that it would give rise to the myth that he could outwalk the African. Yet the most uncommon of his physical attributes was a resistance to disease that would prove more valuable than wealth on a continent where there was debilitation and early death for white and black alike.

As a lad at the village school he had been studious and self-reliant, a little stern and dour, with a look of "potent will" in his features. He was always poring over a book or making a minute examination of some specimen from the out of doors—insect, fossil fragment, seed or wild flower. The fields and banks of the River Clyde were his domain whether there was sun or cloud and bluster. His deliberation on every subject and attraction to study have seemed odd in his circumstances, for he and his family were poor. Closer examination of his background, however, shows that these simple folk were fairly unusual.

His paternal grandfather had been a farmer on the Scottish Island of Ulva in the Hebrides, a man of strong character—"Highland blood"—and an ingrained regard for the office of clan chief that would reappear in his grandson in Africa. In the year 1792, following a dispute involving pride and principle, he uprooted his family and moved to the cotton mills outside Glasgow. There he presented the letter he had carried from his church elders, and settled down among the two thousand inhabitants of Blantyre. All his sons eventually moved away except Neil, who remained in Blantyre and married. Into this family David was born on 19 March 1813. The boy grew up with the tales of this grandfather, who could recount a lineage of six generations that had not one incident of dishonesty or poor scholarship.

David had two brothers and two sisters. The family was well-knit, respectable, devout—"poor and pious" as he called them years later when an admiring public demanded details of his background. Yet the circumstances of their meagre existence were ordinary enough for the time. Neil was a tea dealer in Blantyre and Hamilton, who rented a single tenement room for his family, and could earn no more than was necessary to provide the necessities of life. His personal fulfilment came from distributing Christian tracts to his customers and encouraging them to read them.

He himself was a devoted reader, and was self-taught on a number of subjects centring on religion. He was an amiable and enlightened conversationalist. The range of his interests excluded science, however, in accordance with opinion common at the time that science corrupted faith. For a similar reason novels were barred from the house as unwholesome, and David had no exposure to them. Neil learnt Gaelic, so that he might read the Gospels to his ageing mother. Both his thirst for knowledge and his devotion were bred into David, who collected and read books wherever he could borrow them, and earned his first Bible at the age of nine with recitations of the Psalms in Sunday school.



Neil Livingstone was a Presbyterian and member of the Church of Scotland. He was active in Sunday school and prayer groups and followed news of missionary enterprise. Thus he was described as having “the soul of a missionary”, a kind, amiable man devoted to Christian witness and strict on principles.

David, pressed in adulthood for recollections of his early years, recounted an incident in which when he returned home late he had found himself locked out. His father had bolted the door as usual at nightfall. David’s mother, aware of her son’s predicament, dutifully refrained from pleading for his admission and found him, none the worse for wear and perfectly accepting of his punishment, asleep at the top of the stairs the next morning.

David’s mother was Agnes Hunter, daughter of a devout and intelligent man who had owned property in Airdrie but fell on hard times and removed to Blantyre to earn his living as a tailor. He also read a great deal, and had a large collection of books that he was in the habit of lending. Agnes was a woman of slight frame and a brightness that belied her strict enforcement of good behaviour and Bible study among her children. She also had a serene and loving nature, and David was entirely devoted to her. Looking back on his childhood, he would praise her for deep commitment to the family and suggest that she had contributed to his sense of heritage by reading Gaelic. It was a childhood of security through strictness, education in poverty, and a great deal of love.

His childhood, nevertheless, essentially ended at the age of ten when he went out to work. To help his mother make ends meet he took employment in the mill as a piecer, and later became a spinner. His hours stretched from early morning to eight in the evening and there was little rest. Later he would credit the years of toil with giving him discipline.

He remembered his first earnings, the half crown he had laid proudly in his mother’s lap. In time there was a portion of the wages that he kept, and he bought the first book he owned, a Latin grammar. After returning from factory school at ten in the evening he fought off exhaustion and read for hours while others slept. Back at work again by six the next morning he would prop a book on his machine to continue reading in snatches, ignoring the heat and noise and the taunts of the other boys, few of whom would ever learn to read or write.

Lack of opportunity was only the first obstacle to his education. He had been born into an age of religious revival that was a reaction against the materialism of the Industrial Revolution—an age of religion as a buttress against the erosion of tradition. Scots Presbyterian doctrine was strict, and threatened to hinder the mental progress of the young mind as much as factory work. Neil Livingstone demanded that David give up his interest in science, and the intense religious reflection he encouraged in its place turned David to brooding.

At the age of twenty, David was confronted with a crisis in faith. He felt lost, regardless of whatever good he might do for others, and a desperate sense of unworthiness overwhelmed him. Eventually broad reading led him through the theology of the Evangelical Revival. Then a point came when he was overwhelmed with joy and relief as he accepted that salvation comes of grace, unearned.



He joined the Congregational Church. He discovered the writings of Thomas Dick, who confirmed his growing conviction that science supports religion. Thus he freed himself to seek a vocation, and told his father that he intended to serve God as a medical missionary, teaching and healing.

The tide was rising on missions abroad. All classes supported the work, but craftsmen provided the human resources—cobblers, builders, coopers, locksmiths, gardeners, bookbinders. Their wives went with them to work and raise children in hardship. The Christian principle was uncomplicated: hard work and dedication were an expression of faith and love of fellow man. Overall motivation to be a missionary, however, was more complex. For many the missions were an escape from poverty and the constraints of social class. They offered challenges and opportunities to prove oneself that were non-existent in the rigid stratification of home society.

Early one morning in the winter of 1836, when David was twenty-three, he set out on foot in the snow to walk with his father to Glasgow to find accommodation and begin study at Anderson's College. He would study Greek, theology and medicine. He had very little money, and by the end of his session in April each year he was back in the mills earning for the next year. He did not always save enough, and one year his older brother contributed to his needs.

He would prove as gifted a doctor as his era would allow. If there had been any knowledge of antisepsis, malaria and anaesthesia, he would have acquired it. As it was, he took what the medical profession had to offer and put it to good use: techniques of observation, description and diagnosis, rudimentary surgical procedures, medications that could be made up in the field to serve in primitive conditions.

In the course of his medical studies he met James Young, also known as "Paraffin Young", who was destined to earn a fortune distilling oil from shale. Young's approach to various sciences encouraged David's, and he became a Jack-of-all-trades, so essential in the missions. He made other contacts who became lifelong friends and, in some cases, found patrons. George Wilson, a professor at London University, also encouraged Livingstone's scientific interests and became the enthusiastic recipient of specimens from Livingstone's travels. In London Livingstone met Dr J Risdon Bennet, who guided him in acquiring the practical side of medicine. Professor Richard Owen of the Hunterian Museum became another lifelong associate because he admired Livingstone's command of natural history.

The London Missionary Society accepted missionaries of different church backgrounds and upheld a policy of encouraging converts in the field to initiate their own forms of worship. This freedom of choice appealed to him: a mission society, he felt, should inspire and not constrain. He had stepped away from Established Presbyterianism, believing the interdependence of church and state was detrimental and preferring the spirit of fellowship he found in the independent churches.

In 1837, after persevering with medicine and taking up Greek and theology at Glasgow University, he was provisionally accepted by the London Missionary Society and sent for instruction under the Reverend Richard Cecil in Chipping



Ongar, Essex. In England he continued with the classics and Hebrew and proved an able scholar.

Scholastic aptitude and personal faith appeared to be insufficient, nevertheless. At the time of his assessment it was remarked that he had a certain "rusticity" of manner and dress, that he spoke with a distinctly Scottish accent and could hardly deliver a sermon! Clearly the missions could be upheld by men of humble stock and simple faith and tradesman's skills, but the professions were still the enclave of the disdainful elite! One of the Society's directors spoke in his favour, nevertheless, and he was rescued by a hair's breadth for ordination. He was given a further period of probation and eventually passed.

China had strongly appealed to him because of its remoteness, but it had recently been closed to outsiders by war. It was a serious disappointment to him. With difficulty he tried to look elsewhere, and began to take notice of Africa, where the interior was remote and virtually unmapped, and the peoples diverse and little known. In London, where the Society asked him to complete his medical studies, he met Moffat at a lecture to recruit staff for South Africa. Moffat was a flamboyant and convincing speaker, declaring that he had seen "the smoke of a thousand villages where no missionary has ever been", and the young hopeful medic was won over.

Then the effervescent Mary Smith Moffat took him firmly under her wing, with concern that he was contemplating "going out" without a wife. She made it plain that there would be loneliness, and a house to keep in primitive conditions! Who would teach the native women and children? And surely he realised that living alone would invite accusations of immorality. She seemed to expect him to make a marriage of any sort immediately.

He may have had some idea of his predicament, because he had befriended a young lady named Catherine Ridley who shared his dedication to the missions. She had social position which he did not, however, and her health was uncertain. Later on, hearing that she had married and remained in England, he remembered her without any expression of regret at the unfulfilled prospect. Study and vocation still seemed to occupy all his thoughts.

In the presence of his family he was less sentimental, as if girded for what lay ahead. In 1840, with his medical course and ordination complete, he visited his parents and brothers and sisters to say farewell as he prepared to sail. To his ageing mother, whom he might never see again, he expressed concern instead of affection and sorrow, because he felt she might be approaching eternity unprepared. Did the incident reflect the fervour of a new clergyman or the arrogance of youth? For David Livingstone calling would always take precedence over sentiment.

Reaching Kuruman nine months later, he surveyed the handsome church and school and the houses ranging along an avenue of trees. There were workshops and storehouses, orchards and irrigated gardens where he knew there was nothing before Moffat arrived. Surrounding the station were the villages of the Tlhaping and Tlharo peoples who together made up the populous and sovereign Tswana chiefdoms.



Kuruman was the most important mission of the London Missionary Society, and the mission furthest north. Livingstone felt the pull of the interior at the same time that he realised he was tied with Moffat's work. The large mission needed his attention in Moffat's absence, and news of his medical skills had reached Kuruman even before he had. He would be busy every day treating villagers, missionaries and the mixed-race Griquas who came long distances by wagon.

Yet for all the friendly faces and welcoming commotion at his arrival, something was missing. Kuruman was not the hive of industry that he had expected. The gardens, on closer examination, were unweeded; the outbuildings unrepaired. There was an air of somnolence. Congregations of Africans dutifully appeared in the spacious church but hardly began to fill it. Their homemade clothes of English style seemed to contradict their limited comprehension of his sermons. Where were the masses of converts he had expected, the string of new missions marching into the interior? Years of work had been invested, and Kuruman still stood on the leading edge.

Livingstone was disillusioned, a gullible victim of the romance of mission work that was very much in vogue at the time. Few artists had depicted the people of Africa from personal experience. Even those tended to portray them more like Polynesians than Bantu or Bushmen. Few missionaries had freed themselves to return and describe the realities of the field. Ignorance and false impressions abounded, and Moffat was not the only one who felt the impulse to colour his descriptions, play on the intrigue of the exotic and minimise the obstacles. Every tactic seemed legitimate to attract the financial support and staff that the Society desperately needed.

Livingstone had also begun to recognise that the dynamism of Kuruman depended entirely on Moffat's personal magnetism, and would be absent as long as he was. Neither he nor anyone else could fill the gap, and he had no desire to do so. He would not "build on another man's foundation"<sup>1</sup>. Yet in judging Kuruman he made a fundamental error in estimating the depth of its foundation. He failed to appreciate the labour that had been required to build the edifice he thought so inadequate. Moffat had literally transformed the people as he settled among them. In his early years in Africa they had been overrun in the *difaqane* wars. Those that escaped the reign of terror had been in total disarray. They had never known Europeans, but Moffat had gained their trust and respect, helped them regain their subsistence and went on to invest years of patience and perseverance in turning their thoughts to God.

Livingstone was showing signs of being the brash young critic with no experience. Yet he was doing what he could to provide himself with much-needed experience. He hated his sedentary work. When a lay preacher and artisan named Rogers Edwards appeared at Kuruman and proposed that they put together an expedition he snatched the opportunity at once.

With two Kuruman converts, they set out northwards to survey the land and preach wherever they could by means of translation. Then Livingstone was confronted with another disappointment. Moffat's "thousand villages" did not exist to the north. Kuruman, it turned out, was situated on the edge of a wasteland and it seemed incomprehensible that a more populous area had not been chosen for





*The LMS Mission station at Kuruman*



the investment of so much effort. Conversion of the masses would become a recurrent theme in Livingstone's thoughts.

He and Edwards encountered greater numbers of people in a northeasterly direction along the Molopo River where the Bakgatla of Mosielele smelted iron and controlled the indigenous trade in metal. The Bakwena, under a chief named Kgakge and his regent Bubi, lived a few days further on, and near them were some other people of the crocodile totem under Kgakge's cousin and rival, Sechele. No one had ever preached among these people, and the two travellers received a good welcome.

It was clear enough that the chiefs' materialistic interests motivated their response. Local trade was giving way to goods of European origin—manufactured iron, cloth and beads—that Europeans sought to exchange for the skins, feathers and ivory that they could sell for enormous prices at the coast. Africans knew that every one of the people they nicknamed *makgowa*, whether trader, sportsman or missionary, had some of the coveted factory-made commodities and medicines.

When it was found that Livingstone was a doctor of strong European medicine, he was besieged with pleas for treatment. Some of the sick walked for days to reach him. Thus he held surgery at the tailgate of his wagon while he spoke of Christ's healing. They seemed to have no comprehension of what he was saying; there was no response of any kind. When he told them of a god who loved them and asked that they love each other they remained unmoved. When he demonstrated a kneeling position for prayer they laughed and said that his god must be underground! Yet when they caught a glimpse of themselves in his small mirror their jeering turned to awe. They called him by the name for God and he was shocked. He returned to Kuruman with a greater appreciation for what Moffat had accomplished.

His reservations about Moffat now centred on the mission's meagre use of converts for evangelism. The two Batswana, Paul and Mebalwe, who had travelled with him and Edwards, proved invaluable not only in translation but rendering his ideas in a Setswana context. Yet they seemed to be bound to the parent mission and employed very much as menials in building and routine farm work. Their potential, it seemed to him, was being wasted. If their understanding of doctrine was inadequate, as Moffat maintained, they should be given training in theology, but there was no facility for it. Missionaries were employed in such numbers as to be a heavy expense to the Society, and were overburdened while "native agency" was scarcely utilised. Livingstone saw that the problem went round like a rusty wheel, and there was an obvious need for a fresh approach.

He planned a more extensive journey. The last one had taken him 700 miles (1120km) along tracks but only 250 miles (400km) as the crow flies. This time he intended to cover a greater distance and get on with mastering the language. For the fluency he wanted he knew he must immerse himself with the people, so he took no companion but Paul and Mebalwe, and set out again for the Bakgatla and Bakwena.

Sechele and his people had been attacked by the Amandebele and routed from their homes at Shokwane. Bubi's people had also been driven out, and had



regrouped at Dithubaruba on the edge of the Kalahari thirstland where Livingstone decided to settle down with them and see what influence he could have<sup>2</sup>. He began by showing them how to build a simple classroom, and told them he would try to bring them a Tswana teacher from Kuruman. Then he began an irrigation canal under the assumption that the native method for growing sorghum and beans might be improved with irrigation. The Batswana, he had noted, were so entirely dependent upon infrequent and unpredictable rains that rituals to attract rain had come to dominate their beliefs. He felt an oblique approach might be effective in discouraging their superstition and turning them to God. Later he would despair of having any influence at all on their customs.

For the moment he was satisfied to gain some insight into their thought processes. He discovered that they were willing to dig the canal and carry soil only because they had heard that Kuruman missionaries paid for work in beads and food. When he pointed out that both the canal and his assistance were entirely for their own benefit, not his, they were unimpressed. So he collected up his things to go and suddenly they became willing workers. After this incident he tended to be very critical of missionaries who employed the principle of patience and perseverance in all circumstances. A few weeks later, he left against Bubi's protests that he should stay. He had gained what he intended from the sojourn, and felt he should move further along the edge of the Kalahari.

Everywhere, he was met by pathetic human beings clad in skins who begged to be healed of rheumatism, pneumonia, eye infections and skin diseases. When he treated them, especially in the painful business of excising tumours, he discovered that they were amazingly stoical. Whether men, women, or children, they bore their pain without flinching or crying out, but were equally determined not to respond to his preaching!

When he talked directly to a chief he sometimes made headway, but with Sekgoma of the Bangwato he made none at all. Irritable and peevish by nature, Sekgoma pleaded with Livingstone to give him "the Christianity" he had heard about because he needed help to overcome the terrible, murderous rages that plagued him. So Livingstone talked as he always did, quietly and logically, of God's love for mankind and the gentle humanity of Jesus. When Sekgoma made no response he began again with greater patience. Then, suddenly, he was confronted with the wrath of a chief transformed into a brute, flailing about and shrieking that he refused to listen to any more stupidity: Livingstone must give him the powerful Christian medicine that he needed to eat!

Livingstone reached the northern edge of the Kalahari, and knew that it was almost as far as any European had gone. His guides had begun to speak of a great lake further on that no white man had seen, but he felt no particular desire to investigate; the people were the objects of his pursuit. With his wagon drivers refusing to go further toward the country of the dreaded Amandebele he left the wagons and continued on ox-back with a single servant. He was determined to learn the art of finding and rationing water, and depending upon the people to give him enough food to survive.

He came upon people said to have poisoned a trader and strangled his companion. Indeed, they wore pieces of gun mechanism like amulets round their



necks, and he thought he saw guilt and fear of reprisal on their faces. He made an effort to hide his revulsion and speak calmly, and his presence of mind and courage secured his safe departure.

Moving on, he and the guide reached a non-Tswana people said to be related to a tribe that used guns in place of spears and wore cloth instead of skins—emblems of a life of raiding for captives that they sold to the Portuguese. It was the closest he had come thus far to the slave trade that would dominate his purposes in later years.

He returned to Kuruman hoping to find Moffat. He was anxious to obtain an assignment, and equally anxious that it should be among the peoples of the interior. He had no assurance, however, that he would ever have a mission of his own. For all Moffat's benevolent affability, he had a reputation for being domineering, and Livingstone knew that even an ordained minister might be expected to remain at Kuruman as no more than an assistant. There would be no early resolution of the dilemma. Moffat had not arrived, and there was no choice but to take up his preaching and supervision once again.

Time wore on into 1843. When he could not stand immobility any longer he went back to Bubi's place, but found him miles away, driven out with his people, who were in a state of turmoil. All of Livingstone's work on school and canal had been for nothing. As he departed he heard that Sechele had grown so jealous of the help given to his rival that he was lying in wait to do harm to the missionary. Livingstone did not divert his course, but proceeded and, on arrival at Sechele's, did his best to show composure and trust. Sechele's only son was seriously ill, and he treated him. When the boy recovered his father was overwhelmed with gratitude. A friendship had begun between the two men that would influence both for many years.

At Kuruman Livingstone thought about the terrified women refugees he had seen among the Bakwena after they had fled from an Amandebele raid on their town. The whole country was unsettled. Chiefs were in the habit of relocating at a moment's notice to escape marauders who were themselves only victims who had turned to aggression for survival. He saw how difficult it would be to found a mission anywhere. To add to his problems the Society wrote to say that its directors were establishing a district committee to decide questions like his request for a mission. He hated authority by committee, especially a committee of peers, and the letter had the effect of making him want to bolt.

Edwards, who was considerably older than Livingstone, had recently been ordained and given permission to build a station. He asked his younger colleague to join him and his family, and Livingstone was delighted. He urged Edwards not to delay, even for Moffat's return, and they swiftly agreed to settle with the Bakgatla. Mosielele had shown confidence in Livingstone by admitting him to the iron workings that his people guarded with great secrecy and superstition among the hills in the locality of the Molopo. His chieftdom was reasonably stable, and he had expressed a willingness to remove his town to Mabotsa where there was water and enough flat land for buildings<sup>3</sup>. By late 1843 Livingstone was helping Edwards with a large hut and a dam and canal.



The hut doubled as a school, and he took up the teaching of the Kgatla children. Unwashed, unclothed and unruly, they had also been instilled by their parents with fear that the white man would eat them, and they were terrified. He hardly knew how to proceed. Mentioning his classroom dilemma to a missionary wife, she told him bluntly that he had no imagination! It came as no surprise. He knew he was "as mute as a fish", and would never learn to sing as teachers of infants' classes seemed to be required to do. Women succeeded better with games and rhymes and making lively renditions of Bible stories.

With perseverance, however, he gained the children's confidence and made slight progress. He saw that he might even succeed, and then that he might become enamoured with the occupation, as he had when enthusiasm overtook him in other things. The prospect was not entirely welcome. Teaching was repetitious, and with anything repetitious he knew that time and energy were being consumed that might be put to better use. He plodded ahead with reservation—and the desire to delegate the task at the first opportunity.

When the Moffats arrived at the Cape in January of the new year, 1844, Livingstone rode out to meet them as they reached the Vaal River. Robert Moffat caught sight of him approaching on a horse at full gallop, and was amazed at the transformation in the intense and bookish young man he had met in London. Livingstone was tanned and athletic and wore a suit of hand-sewn cloth that seemed to make him part of the rugged, open landscape. Moffat himself was changed, for he was greying after four years away, a little more masterful, if that was possible, and obviously inspired by his return to Africa.

For hours the two men rode on the wagon box together, deep in conversation. Livingstone, whose new venture hung in the balance, encountered no resistance after all. Moffat, it turned out, was no lover of committees himself. A rapport grew between them that would last a lifetime—and be reinforced with another bond. Mrs Moffat rode with her children, the eldest Mary. In England, the girl had been "half-engaged" for a while to a distant relative but remained unmarried and was on her way home to Kuruman. Livingstone, who had caused Mrs Moffat so much concern over his bachelor state, noticed the shy, plump girl with black hair.

He returned to Mabotsa, working every day except Sundays to finish the mission buildings. Kuruman craftsmen helped with construction and carpentry, as did Paul and Mebalwe, who also helped to teach and preach. They were exciting days, full of the exhilaration of breaking new ground. The country was lush and green with streams and rivers. The Molopo and Marico Rivers attracted game, so they had plenty of meat for the table. Game, however, attracted predators, and there was a spate of incidents in which cattle and sheep were killed by lions.

One day there were people shouting and gesticulating toward a clump of trees where a lion had taken refuge after being driven away from livestock. Livingstone stood watching the confusion when suddenly the beast sprang into the open and caught hold of him. Almost before anyone realised what was happening the lion had his head in its mouth, and there, on that bright day among the scenic hills, Livingstone would have lost his life had Mebalwe not aimed his musket and fired.

Livingstone survived with his left arm badly mauled. It would heal but never be the same, nor would he. The arm would be shorter and weaker, and he would



learn to support his gun with his right hand. He would find the work of building more gruelling than ever, and, more significantly, become aware of an apparently God-given dispensation from death in that incident and many others.

Convalescence was almost impossible. He had never been idle. Nor did he like being dependent. He was an unwilling invalid living in a house with Rogers Edwards and his wife; and to add insult to injury, he was the victim of neglect. The bed linen was seldom changed, and was full of fleas. His wound festered while he waited for clean dressings. He found that he would rather turn to his workers for help than ask anything of the Edwards. The distance that had always existed between the middle-aged Edwards and himself had grown into a gulf. He felt he was constantly being reminded that he was the junior partner and a bachelor besides, a man of no status at all.

His unmarried condition was becoming untenable. Until the Moffat daughters arrived he had hardly met an unmarried woman of his own society, and admitted with as much truth as humour that he might be obliged to make a marriage by correspondence with "some decent sort of widow"<sup>4</sup>. Returning to work after the accident, he strained his injured arm by trying to catch a falling stone, and it was then that he decided that there would be no more convalescence with the Edwards. He left for Kuruman to find some comfort and congenial company and the opportunity to extend his brief acquaintance with young Mary Moffat.

Mary, named for her mother and grandmother, was the eldest of nine children. She had been born at Griqua Town, where her father had built a house of poles, reed and mud in Setswana style. Tswana women had called her mother *Mma-Mary* by the custom of naming a mother after her firstborn, and they delighted in coming into the rude little house to watch the woman with the yellow hair and the baby that had no colour at all. They would stay for hours, and keep the woman from her cooking, washing and scrubbing.

Mary Moffat, before she had married Robert, had not been prepared for such a life. She had spent her girlhood in a comfortable home in Lancashire, where her father had been a prosperous market gardener when Robert came to seek employment. As she came to know Robert, she realised that she shared his sense of calling to the mission field. In Africa that dedication had been sorely tested.

On one occasion, a turning point in the early days, her baby daughter Mary had fallen ill. She was holding the feverish, crying infant and trying in vain to light a fire in the hearth for cooking when she broke down in tears of despair over the difficulties of her life. When the crisis passed she found new fortitude to dedicate herself to the work she believed God had given her, and not long afterwards she was writing enthusiastic letters to England describing how to smear an earthen floor with cow dung to "lay the dust" and bring up the polish to "a fine, clear green".

Daughter Mary, born in Africa, had never had any need to adapt. Her father had built his mission at Kuruman and she had lived happily there with a Khoi orphan as her earliest companion. She and her brothers and sisters all learned Setswana as their first language, and she was a carefree, vivacious child who enjoyed a special relationship with the African people.



When she was ten, however, she had been obliged to leave the security of home to go to boarding school, because there was no adequate school near home. Her mother and younger sister Ann travelled by wagon to the Wesleyan mission at Salem, far away on the eastern coast near Graham's Town, a five weeks' journey to what seemed another world. Mary had known few outside their closely-knit group, and the settlers of European extraction around Salem were sometimes unfriendly to missionaries and their children.

She endured five years at the school, during which her mother visited twice and her father not at all. She received an education at great cost to her happiness, and the experience left its mark in the form of a stubborn, unnatural self-reliance and a tendency to hide almost all her feelings.

In 1836 she had gone to a school in Cape Town with a younger brother and sister. She had chosen to train as a teacher, but the course was interrupted when her parents came to take her with them as they set sail for England in 1839. Her father toured and lectured in Britain, stunning audiences with his oratory while she and her family stood apart. She was self-contained and shy, never got used to the cold, and never stopped remembering Africa. She studied and helped her mother, and watched without apparent reaction as her only marriage prospect appeared and disappeared.

She was not pretty. Her recognised worth lay in her ability to assist in every task and circumstance. At fifteen she had been called back from school to take charge when her mother was seriously ill. On board ship as the family waited to disembark for England in 1839, she had helped with her sister's birth and, within hours, provided the same strength as her young brother Jamie lay dying.

In England, she had done more than her share of the work in a household of eight people, and when it was finally time to depart had almost singlehandedly packed and labelled tons of baggage—the gifts and assorted accumulation of four and a half years that her father insisted on taking back to Africa.

Back at Kuruman at twenty-three she still had a glimmer of the carefree nature she had shown as a child. She was at home among missionaries and Africans. She taught in the school, sewed and baked, and chided and cajoled the Tlhaping youngsters and servants as her mother always did. No one seemed very concerned about her future because her help was valued by everyone. She might well be the one to care for ageing parents.

At this point the earnest young missionary, quietly attentive to everyone and everything, arrived to recover from the attack they had heard about with great astonishment. They welcomed him and encouraged him to rest and regain his strength. He settled down, writing a great many letters and carrying on endless conversations with her father. He also talked with her. Eventually, his injured arm was as well as it might be, and still he stayed on. He could be seen walking down to the forge and gardens, questioning every procedure, trying every new method; and he walked with her. Then one day as they stood at the almond tree which is still there at the garden entrance, he asked if she would marry him. For Mary, who had hardly dared to consider marriage, life changed instantly. In the household of the dynamic, affable Moffats she had felt inadequate; David Livingstone had confidence and strength for both of them. He talked of his mission, made



plans for them and then went off to Mabotsa to build her a house as big as her mother's!

He faced a period of chagrin in his relations with the Society because his application had declared that he had no intention of marrying. He informed the directors, rather stiffly, that he now felt marriage to be his "duty" and was "making the necessary arrangements"<sup>5</sup>. To his fellows at college he was more candid about his feelings. He was overwhelmed, he wrote, to the extent that words almost failed him. It would undoubtedly comfort them though, he conceded, "to know that I am become as great a fool as any of you"<sup>6</sup>. To Mary, from his euphoria, he proclaimed that if her father forgot to get them a marriage licence, they would license themselves!

He wrote to her in scattered moments free from work, apologising for hands that he would not wash clean. Words of sentiment were few, but he always sent greetings to her mother and sister Ann as if they were already family. He was concerned for her welfare and advised her, when she came, to bring a servant from Kuruman: the Bakgatla were quite useless as help in the house and she might find the work rather heavy. Then, with wry humour over practicalities in the midst of courtship, he told her to be sure that her mother's maid finished sewing his new underwear—before he had none to wear! He described the new house with pride and when it was nearly ready returned to Kuruman in January of 1845. They were married in the church of stone and thatch that her father had built<sup>7</sup>.

Despite evidence to the contrary, some writers have denied that there was romance in Livingstone's courtship of Mary. It has been argued that the marriage was one of convenience because Mary was eminently suitable for the role of missionary's wife and frontier homemaker<sup>8</sup>. Indeed, she was energetic and used to hard work, comfortable with the climate and few amenities. She had all the skills her mother had built up over many years—bartering, making up remedies, butchering, drying meat, preserving food. Light reading was her only leisure activity, wagon travel her only recreation. To be of use to everyone was her personal mission, and she had long since gained the love and respect of the Africans among whom she lived and worked.

She was also just the sort of partner required by the stubborn and unfathomable personality of David Livingstone. She was amiable and compliant, the "cypher" he prescribed for every relationship if partners were to agree. He acknowledged the plainness of her features, and in so doing provided generations with apparent evidence of a practical decision. In the same breath, nevertheless, he declared his deep affection. Mary was "no romantic, but a matter-of-fact lady, a little, thickset, black-haired girl, sturdy, and all that I want"<sup>9</sup>.

The question of "convenience" might be considered as easily on Mary's side. Livingstone was "no bonny" in the estimation of a friend from school days, but she accepted his proposal without hesitation. Victorian society rather expected a woman to marry, and she had no other prospects. Two of her sisters would also marry missionaries, one rather unhappily because she too would have little choice.

Did Mary know that Livingstone would dominate her completely? The realisation would not have detracted from the fondness she felt. Subordination was a component of the security that her role and retiring personality required. Beyond



this she may never have presumed to judge her suitor; her father's good opinion of him was recommendation enough. If she looked for attributes in his favour, in any case, she would have found them. His sincere, intense manner had a charm all its own, producing an effect on the African people she readily discerned, however "rustic" his own society might think him. He was educated, dedicated, hard working and adaptable, and if he was not given to pronouncements of affection, then neither was she. It mattered greatly that he was devoted and kind, and she almost certainly assumed that all her needs would be considered.

She was undoubtedly less aware that he was so driven and idealistic that a conflict would eventually arise between his goals and his family life sufficient to separate them. There was no way for her to know that the way of life he would choose for both of them would place insupportable demands on a wife and children. With the perspective of hindsight it has been suggested that he should never have married. Such wisdom, if he had possessed it, however, would have required more foreknowledge than most people have; and these were early days in the life and career of the nineteenth century's most remarkable explorer.

In one instance he did seem to anticipate his own inability to devote himself to a wife and family. He insisted that his bride, even before they married, give her greatest devotion to God. "Let your affection be towards Him much more than towards me, and kept by His mighty power & grace I hope I shall never give you cause to regret that you have given me a part"<sup>10</sup>.

It would be an unusual marriage, much commented upon in the years when he lived and travelled alone and found solitude congenial. The marriage, if not the health and happiness of Mary, would survive the scrutiny of sceptics, while few would realise the depth of their devotion.



## Chapter Two

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### Failed Beginnings 1845 - 1847

*In the little-known town of Gopane near Zeerust lie the ruins of the old Mabotsa mission. The surrounding fence is broken but the foundations inviolate. Remnants of the bygone enterprise lie undisturbed amidst the hum of modern rural Africa. An abandoned grinding stone. Incomplete circles of stone hut bases. Foundation stones for a large house quarried by the man who came to Africa as an artisan. Fragments of mud walls layered wet by the younger man, the innovator, who found another way when his injured arm would not lift stone.*

*A few years ago the folds of irrigation channels were discernible on the plain near the site of the house, but these have been obscured by recent settlement. Beyond the village the ground is open across to the hills, the landscape admired by the young wife who came to make a home like her mother's. Yet in this fertile soil, among the wooded hills, permanence was denied and the gardens she planted turned fallow.*

The honeymoon was a twelve-day journey to their new home, where they arrived in March of 1845. Mary surveyed the new buildings and gardens neatly arranged within an amphitheatre of hills. There were streams on high ground that converged and fell toward the valley to give them a constant supply of fresh water. The similarities to Kuruman were remarkable.

The walls of the big, well-made house were stone to waist height, and from there, after Livingstone had nearly re-broken his arm, had been continued in mud. It was a Tswana method which layered wet earth in stages, each layer left to dry before the next was added. The thatch was laid thick to protect against the intense heat of October and pelting rains of November.

While Livingstone was away Edwards had also been injured, sustaining a crushed finger between two stone slabs. The buildings had taken their toll, but the meeting house that would serve as school and church was nearly finished. Only the roof remained, and bundles of poles, grass and reeds were already propped against trees. A new campaign now began for early completion of all the buildings to recover time for evangelism. Mosielele, who had been so anxious that they settle with him, had done little to encourage his people to listen to the missionaries' message.

Mary took over teaching the Kgatla children, and soon realised that her Tlhaping pupils at Kuruman had been more co-operative and capable. Mosielele occasionally sent out orders to parents to send their children to school, but even then many escaped to the planting, weeding and herding. Sometimes Mary found fifty children gathered, and the next day no more than five. They were intensely curious about her, nevertheless, and intuitively unafraid though they had never



seen a white woman before. Gradually the tales of *makgowa* monsters began to disappear.

She started a reading class for women, only to be reminded that in poverty few but the elderly can afford to be absent from work. Younger women were the labourers, hoeing, building, carrying firewood and water, pounding grain and cooking—with the weight of a child on their backs and often another in their bellies. Undeterred, she also started a class in sewing. Tswana men traditionally plied the heavy needles needed to join skins with gut to cover themselves, which helped to explain why women and children went about almost naked. Her mother had used skins when there was no other material to clothe her pupils, but cloth had arrived with foreign traders. Mary felt she had to make a beginning with the people, though her time could easily have been taken up with making the house habitable. A single helper from Kuruman to carry water, winnow grain, rub the floor and scrub the clothes was hardly sufficient, and she was expecting a child.

Livingstone and Edwards built sluice gates to bring water up to the houses, then Edwards set out southward to buy supplies. Livingstone was glad to be rid of him. Impressed at first with the man's ability and unassuming manner, he had personally recommended him to the Society for full missionary status; now they were at odds most of the time. Edwards seemed to Livingstone to have become peevish and overbearing; Edwards may have been equally annoyed to find himself lumbered with an studious loner who refused to defer to age and experience.

Livingstone had already demonstrated difficulty in getting on with other missionaries on the voyage out. Recently he had made an earnest effort to apply the principle of Christian charity in his dealings with Edwards. After all, he deplored petty quarrelling among missionaries. Simultaneously, however, he was confiding in Moffat at great expense of time and paper, the details of their quarrels.

For all his frustrations with Edwards, he was essentially free of ambivalence. He had never intended to share a mission on a permanent basis. To lead might have been acceptable; simply to co-operate was not. His partnership with Edwards had been expedient, and he would bide his time to begin on his own.

He avoided mentioning his sentiments to Edwards, and busied himself now with laying groundwork at Tshongwane where Sechele had settled with his followers<sup>11</sup>. It was a two-day journey and he usually took some trees and seeds to plant, stayed for a few days to preach to the people and returned. Sechele always listened attentively, and the Bakwena seemed already more amenable to the Gospel than the Bakgatla, whom he considered "dry bones indeed".

Mabotsa still consumed most of his time. He must appear to persevere among the Bakgatla. Weeks and months dragged out, but he and Mary enjoyed the company of a succession of visitors, many of whom they had met previously at Kuruman. William Cotton Oswell, Thomas Steele and Frank Vardon were officers in the British Army in India, and each in turn had taken leave to travel. They were exhilarated by the climate and untrodden expanses of South Africa. They would endure putrid water, useless servants, clouds of dust, flooded rivers, and risk their lives among lions for the pure exhilaration of shooting game in a sportsman's paradise.



They were congenial company and stimulating companions, enthusiastic young men of good breeding and highly literate. They admired Mary's efforts to make a home in difficult conditions and Livingstone's hard-won education and perseverance with labour and evangelism. He did not remonstrate against the excesses of their sport, but consciously avoided joining them. What they considered to be a successful hunting expedition provided meat for themselves, their drivers and servants—and carcasses for hundreds of vultures. Nevertheless he welcomed their interest in the people of the country and its geography and botany. They discussed feasible routes to the undiscovered lake beyond the Kalahari that had become a topic of interest and conjecture among Europeans.

Oswell would eventually become Livingstone's travelling companion and closest friend. He took an interest in Sechele and taught him numbers and arithmetic. Not all of the travellers were as interested in the welfare of Africans. An eccentric Scot named Roualeyn Gordon Cumming, whose later reminiscences would become well known, found it amusing to encourage the Batswana in their superstitions and made a habit of beating his servants. Livingstone nevertheless helped him whenever he could, as he did all the travellers, and they attended his church services and asked him what they could provide—a wagon, a horse or transport for messages and goods.

Sechele often came to Mabotsa to satisfy his curiosity about missionaries and the other foreigners that visited them, and to haggle for anything they might sell. He had always been an avid trader, but had lost his interest in acquiring beads and copper wire for his wives' bracelets. He wanted the possessions of the outsider, even when he was not entirely clear as to their use! He wanted soap and iron pots, a mattress and table, lanterns and cutlery. He wanted a horse and a wagon to hunt and travel like a white man and, above all, guns.

For hunting guns were far more effective than spears, and the best possible deterrent to the dreaded Amandebele. Since the eighteen-twenties and the *difaqane* wars, guns had been valued with life itself. Now there were those among the white population, particularly settlers of Dutch, German and Huguenot extraction, that did not want modern weapons to get into the hands of Africans. These were the "Boers"—peasant farmers—who would eventually call themselves *Afrikaners*. Despite diverse roots they had a common language, later known as *Afrikaans*. It had evolved primarily from the Dutch of the original Cape settlers, but among its various roots were the Portuguese, Malay and even Bantu languages. A common culture had evolved that borrowed heavily from the African without acknowledging his skills and knowledge of the land. The Boers had assimilated to Africa without assimilating to the African.

When the British Government in the Cape had abolished slavery, upon which so many farms in the Colony depended, farmers had refused to alter their ways or bow to British authority. Beyond the Vaal they had taken land occupied and then abandoned by Mzilikazi, the Ndebele chief, and thereafter proclaimed a dubious right of victory over the Amandebele. Their intention was to make huge farms and to this end to create a republic of the Transvaal in which they would control the black man by denying him firearms. To them the English would always be adversaries as long as they allowed the Africans to own guns and



horses. For Africans, fear of the Amandebele was rapidly being replaced by fear of the Boers, and Sechele's greatest need was for guns to protect his people against them. He had resettled four times in four years, from Tshongwane to Shokwane, to Mogodimo, to Thamaga, and again to Tshongwane, to avoid raids by the Amandebele and the Bangwaketse, but every location he had chosen was within territory claimed by the Boers. When he had first found them settling in his vicinity he had naively gone to their commandant, Andries Potgieter, with a gift of ivory and a request for help in recovering his cattle from the Amandebele. To his amazement Potgieter took the ivory as tribute, did nothing to help him and declared that one more chief had accepted his authority!

Sechele had been furious. Realising that he had nearly relinquished his people's independence, he learned a valuable lesson. He refused to deal with the Boers, and decided to hold them off with force if necessary. He built a stone wall with musket slits as a defence around his town, and acquired guns quickly by whatever means he could. He practised marksmanship until his people called him Ramokonopi—"Crack Shot"—and challenged visitors to target shooting competitions that he invariably won. He taught his men sharpshooting and gun-cleaning and, when a gun needed repair, took it to the missionaries at Mabotsa.

Chief Sechele was about thirty-six years old and an unusual man by anyone's estimation. English travellers described him variously: tall and stately, with superior physique and a well-made face; prone to cunning; preoccupied with persuading foreigners to give up their goods! Livingstone, whose opinions were often markedly individualistic, was impressed with the man's interest in European ways and thinking and his remarkable intelligence. He noticed that he quickly stopped begging when it was pointed out that it annoyed Englishmen, and that he mastered the alphabet in only three days.

Sechele had always worn an ordinary *kaross* with four red feathers in his hair, but these had been replaced—first with a regal looking hartebeest skin, and then with sewn clothes that he took off at the river and washed along with his body. The animal fat he had smeared on himself as a cosmetic and dusted down with red ochre had gone. He washed with soap when he could get it, and pipe clay when he could not. He put on shirts and trousers that he bought from Griqua traders and the various itinerant Europeans, McCabe, Evans and Wilson, that had begun to appear in his town with wagons full of goods in search of ivory and karosses. When none came in his direction, he sent an order for goods to the obliging Mary Moffat, who always accepted payment in kind.

When Livingstone was sent a straw hat but refused to be seen in it, it turned up on Sechele's head. On the Sabbath Sechele wore a bright red coat, and on certain other occasions an English-styled suit of leopard skin. He cultivated a theatrical appearance, and achieved it with outlandish combinations. He could be seen wearing rubber boots and an overcoat on a scorching day, but somehow never looked absurd. He moved with a dignified demeanour, towering over his attendants. With foreigners his manner was serious, even grave. He greeted everyone with an outstretched hand, because he had seen Livingstone do it.

He learned to read at an astonishing rate, beginning with a spelling book Livingstone had provided and going on almost immediately to the New



Testament and other portions of the Bible Moffat had put into Setswana. He became so intrigued with Isaiah and David that he quoted long passages of the Bible in his conversation. With awe he exclaimed, "He was a fine man, that Isaiah; he knew how to speak"<sup>12</sup>.

Livingstone knew Sechele's motives were essentially temporal, not spiritual. He wanted a *monare* to "help him in sickness, mend his gun, teach him to read, and *`nthuta bothale*' (teach me wisdom)"<sup>13</sup>. The Bakwena believed that they would get "plenty of rain, beads and guns" if a missionary lived among them. Livingstone was not deterred. Any form of enthusiasm could provide the soil for planting Christian belief in the hope that it would take root.

It was late in 1845. Relations between Livingstone and Edwards had become steadily more strained. Edwards rankled at a report in the *LMS Chronicle* that gave his brash young partner credit for founding Mabotsa. He fully expected Livingstone to write and correct the error, but he did not. Over the coming years Livingstone would display a marked pattern of claiming credit entirely for himself when others had contributed. Edwards retaliated with a lengthy statement to the Society that charged Livingstone with making him into a mere "appendix".

The inflamed antagonism proved useful to Livingstone. It provided him an opportunity to break away from Mabotsa without being blamed. He now had a house at Tshongwane among Sechele's people, and decided that he would put all his effort into making it habitable quickly. He would leave Mabotsa as soon as Mary had given birth to the child. He did not inform the District Committee of his decision, much less ask their approval. The heady sensation of self-determination overtook any satisfaction he might get from sanction. During the last weeks of the year he spent a good deal of time at Tshongwane, sleeping a few hours in a hut and then rising before daybreak to teach at the *kgotla* and then throwing himself into the building work that took every daylight hour. He was stretched to the limit and thoroughly inspired by the challenge.

Mary's feelings almost certainly were different. Her husband had never discussed his concerns with her as he did with his friends by correspondence. If she had assumed that Mabotsa would be a home where they could settle and raise children she would be disappointed. They were on the move even before the end of their first year, and at a time when the advent of a child made her most dependent and in need of a settled life. On the other hand she undoubtedly found little in common with Mrs Edwards. Mary was a careful housekeeper, devoted to providing cleanliness and comfort in the home, and Mrs Edwards was quite the opposite.

Mary's sister Ann had visited from Kuruman to offset Mary's loneliness when David was away, but when she had departed, and stopped with her wagon and helpers for the night, she had been terrified by a lion in camp. After that Mary could hardly expect her sister to return, and faced a lonely exile from female companionship at Tshongwane. David would remain the decision-maker and her only companion.

He was the instigator of her isolation, yet he was kind. When she had been ill in the early stages of pregnancy he had used his knowledge of bleeding procedures to relieve her discomfort. While he had worked at Tshongwane on their





*The vegetable garden at Mabotsa*



new house, he had hurried everything in order to return to her as soon as he could. He bought a horse to travel more quickly. When she had been incapacitated with headache, he had left the building work to stay with her. When the time came for the child to be born, she knew he would be there. She could not be better off if she were at Kuruman.

The months wore on and her illness subsided. They spent long, happy evenings working in the gardens they had planted when they arrived. She was the experienced gardener, daughter of a gardener, and he the novice with the strength and stamina for digging out tree roots and hoeing weeds. They were delighted with their produce. They had cabbages, lettuce, turnips and onions for the table.

Mary stayed at home, continuing her teaching on the veranda and helping David by writing his letters. She had expected the child in December, but the weeks wore on into January. Finally the baby was born and it was a boy, delivered almost a year to the day after their marriage<sup>14</sup>. They called him Robert Moffat after Mary's father, because Livingstone said he did not welcome the prospect of the Batswana calling him "Rra-Neeley" if he named the boy after his own father. "Rra-Robert" would be infinitely preferable!

The boy was fretful and gave Mary little peace, but within a few weeks they were ready to leave for Tshongwane. Edwards' absences had made him unaware of Livingstone's determination to leave Mabotsa and the preparations Livingstone had made. One day, in an attitude of defiance, Livingstone loaded his wagons while Edwards watched in utter amazement. They had not got on, but here was Livingstone flinging Mabotsa—buildings, gardens, people and responsibility—into his hands. He protested weakly that he had not expected their quarrel to take such a toll.

The Bakgatla were equally alarmed. The chief begged Livingstone to tell him why he was going. Should he try harder to change his people's ways? Were there thieves among them who had stolen his goods? Livingstone kept silent in a way that seemed to suggest that if they felt abandoned and benumbed they had only themselves to blame. In the record of the incident both Edwards and the Bakgatla would be implicated in Livingstone's decision to leave, yet he had meant to go almost from the very beginning.

When they arrived at Tshongwane with their belongings, the land looked barren and windswept as they settled into the unfinished house. They set to work planting the precious vegetable seeds received from Henry Methuen, the naturalist, who had been among those who had visited them at Mabotsa. They watered the seeds and saw them germinate, but it soon became clear that they would lose every fragile plant. No rain had fallen in November, and continual carrying of water was impossible; the stream was nearly dry. There was insufficient water for the cattle, and the little moisture that pooled in the river bed was too filthy for drinking, cooking or even washing.

The problem of water at Tshongwane was not seasonal but perennial. Sechele had certainly been aware of this before Livingstone came to preach among his people, yet to have admitted the problem would have discouraged the missionary from settling. When he could avoid the subject no longer Sechele promised that he would remove his people to a well-watered place as soon as Livingstone



chose to go. Thus the habitation of Tshongwane, like Mabotsa, was destined for failure from the very beginning, and of this Livingstone was almost certainly aware before he and Mary arrived with their belongings. It hardly mattered to him. Tshongwane had served its purpose; he had gained his independence. Now he must bide his time to protect it. He searched the dry stream bed for the marks left by animals digging for water, and deepened the hole to meet his needs.

He could do nothing to save his burnt-up wheat. At Mabotsa he had reaped a hundred and sixty-eight buckets for only five buckets sown. They had picked maize and dug potatoes by the basketful. The place had held greater potential than Kuruman, but he had seen his gardens fall to Edwards. While Edwards' family had plenty he and Mary would be short of food and water, but he would never regret his decision. Others might think that he had thrown his chance away, but he preferred to set his own yardsticks, and it gave him great satisfaction to be the furthest on the frontier. In letters he indulged in descriptions of the wildness of the country and the risk of animal attack; nor was it beneath him to indulge in building something like an aura of self-sacrifice. He was coming into his own, at last.

Missions in the established south were so well provided for that the indigenous people had become coddled and spoilt, he firmly believed. They were never asked to take up the responsibility for their own religious life. The effectiveness of those missions was meagre, while costs ran high. The worst aspect of the situation was that resources of staff and funds were being expended that might be put into new areas. In new country he intended to establish a network of stations under "native agency"—Tswana evangelists—who could be trained and supervised by only one European to save expense.

His own services to the Society, in the meantime, were markedly inexpensive. He had been allocated no funds, and he knew that this was largely due to money having been squandered on the established missions. The District Committee might choose to defray the costs he had incurred with his new mission, or it might not. He still had not submitted a formal statement of his intentions to its members.

David Livingstone was becoming increasingly a renegade. It almost appeared as if he had lost his sense of self-preservation. He saw deprivation, however, as an essential element of what he was attempting and was not without a martyr's awareness of his plight. Under the stress of overwork at Tshongwane his emotions veered. He became maudlin, writing letters that dwelt on his sorrow in being unable, through penury, to assist his parents in emigrating to America and his concern that he would never see them again except "in God's Kingdom."

Mary began the teaching of the Kwena women only to find that she was pregnant again. Robert was only a few months old, and she knew that she would not be able to care for him and the house and to teach as her physical burden increased. Naturally energetic and good-humoured, she had become tired and drawn. She reconciled herself to more long months of working in and around the house. She was grateful at least that David had made a kitchen attached to the house at Tshongwane, instead of one across the yard.



The school duty fell to Paul and his grown son Isaac. Mebalwe helped, as he did in everything. He had originally stayed at Mabotsa to free Livingstone as he travelled to and fro, then Livingstone had returned one last time to offer Mebalwe the chance to stay at Mabotsa where his land was cleared and planted, but the Motswana had collected his family at once, abandoned his newly-made house and gardens and moved with Livingstone.

Livingstone placed heavy responsibilities on his Kuruman assistants, who were willing to turn their hands to anything for a chance to preach. He expected a great deal from them, perhaps because his own disadvantaged background had shown him that responsibility and challenge were catalysts even in the face of great obstacles. He intended to give the men what training he could, but felt a great impatience for the time when a theological college or seminary could be established. The Society had not even considered it. He knew he could better address the issue when he had placed his men in stations of their own to demonstrate their ability and dedication, but he felt he could not wait to make some kind of move. He wrote his proposal to London and, despite the poor relationship, to the District Committee.

It was past the middle of the year 1846. He had finished most of the internal walls of the house and some plastering. Little Robert had been unwell but was better, so he felt he might make a hurried journey east to Magaliesberg. Mokgatlé, chief of a large group of Bafokeng, had asked him for a teacher. He could do little more at present than discuss with him the possibility of an outstation, but the chief's request was significant and deserved encouragement. He made a hurried departure, was gone a few days, and then managed to return in time to welcome Mary's mother, who had surprised everyone at Kuruman with her determination to see her first grandchild. Escorted by a Tswana hunting party, she had travelled all the way from Kuruman to Tshongwane with three children ranging in age from five to ten, and arrived with the supplies intact that her daughter's family so desperately needed. Truly, *Mma-Mary* was a remarkable woman.

The homestead reverberated with more laughter than it had heard since their arrival from Mabotsa. As always, *Mma-Mary* was as energetic and efficient as she was intrepid. She attended to her grandson, advised the struggling family, instructed and encouraged their helpers, and inspired everyone including herself. The rugged settlement reminded her of Kuruman in the early days, she declared, and went on to proclaim that she saw signs of Christianity taking root! When it was time to leave it seemed as if she had only just arrived, but neither her husband nor Kuruman could do without her for much longer.

She had been worried at Kuruman after Mary wrote of the baby's illness and their difficulties. Now that the baby was well and she had seen their unfortunate circumstances in the context of her son-in-law's effort to break new ground, she departed with an easier mind. She believed in the importance of family cohesion in the Christianisation of the African, and she liked and admired Livingstone. If she had been able to look ahead, however, she might have wondered what cost would be counted to maintain that unity.

But the concerns she had tried so hard to overcome proved justified. Within days of her departure, Robert was ill with bronchial pneumonia. He became



feverish and frail and his breathing, Livingstone remarked, was like the cooing of wood pigeons. He applied every treatment, but nothing seemed to help, and he waited with little hope for his son's life. October was a season of epidemics, he observed in his helplessness. Extreme daytime temperatures fell too suddenly in the evening when a wind rose from showers in the distance. The season passed, finally, and Robert still clung to life. To his father's overwhelming relief and amazement the boy survived.

In a few weeks, when he was more certain of the boy's health and Mary's, he departed on another reconnaissance eastward with Mebalwe. He intended to be away six weeks or more, and knew the risk his family would face in his absence. Almost as soon as he had gone he returned home to take Mary and Robert with him. Apprehension, or conscience, had driven him back.

Far to the east they discovered dense populations but a great deal of intertribal warfare. The people were much in need of Christian influence. They were also frightened of outsiders, he discovered, and backed away quite unaccountably until he discovered that they thought he and his family were Boers!

On their return the baby suffered relapse. They were fording a flooded river when his fever shot up, and before Livingstone could deal with the emergency the boy seemed beyond hope. Mary broke down in despair. Then, as before, hours passed and the child continued his laboured breathing. Slowly he recovered. They pushed on wearily toward home, Livingstone aware that their supplies were nearly exhausted and there would be nothing in their gardens to feed them when they arrived. He told himself that God would provide, but was more certain than ever that they had no future in that part of country.

He returned to find the Boers in his area causing mischief in his absence. They had sent Sechele an order to disarm. Livingstone felt obliged to take the role of mediator in the dispute, but it was the only time he ever interceded. His reply was a plea for reason: if the Boers forced the Bakwena to relinquish the few guns they had acquired, they would force his people to flee and his mission would collapse for lack of a population. If the Boers would suspend their demand to disarm, he promised, he would inform them if the Bakwena prepared to use their weapons for any reason. To this he added the assurance that he would visit their farms to treat the sick. There were more messages, and then the Boers backed down.

By and large the Boer emigrants were healthy. They ate homegrown food and lived an outdoor lifestyle on the veld. Their diet, on the other hand, was saturated with animal fat, strong coffee and stronger drink. They had little knowledge of disease, and were superstitious in their remedies. They spurned calomel, which any doctor of the day found essential. Their traditional treatments were jumbled with nonsense, like the belief that smearing a tree with matter from an abscess would make a person well. Their suffering encouraged a reverence for doctors, and, having none of their own, they welcomed Livingstone and the occasional itinerant physician that appeared.

Livingstone confided in Moffat after the Boer incident. His skill in diplomacy where Boer farmers were involved was severely limited, he conceded. They were closed to reason when it came to relations with the African people, and



potentially very dangerous. If they came to the mission when he was there he could placate them, but if they came again while he was away they might well destroy his buildings and property.

Boers claimed the territory from the Vaal to the Limpopo and from the Drakensberg Mountains to the Kalahari, and had not stopped expanding. Every man had a farm larger than he could work by himself, and wanted 6,000 morgen, more than 12,000 acres, for each of his sons. Besides this, the frontiersmen proliferated at an astonishing rate. Childlessness was unknown, and a couple usually had six or eight children.

Africans who did not resist the seizure of their land were often allowed to stay with their crops and herds. Others were driven off by men who rode up to their homes on horses, seized grain, slaughtered sheep and drove off their cattle. Chiefs on adjacent land were ordered to provide labour for Boer planting or harvesting, and these labourers, both men and women, were forced to leave their planting to work on Boer farms for days or weeks without pay. Babies were tied onto their mothers' backs, tools collected and food head-carried; none would be provided by the Boers. Livingstone saw the injustices, and heard tales of many more. He spoke to the farmers about them but found that, while many admitted that there was bad treatment of Africans, all denied involvement.

A surprising proportion of Boers failed to see anything wrong in the way they were treating the indigenous people. Some maintained that it had not been loss of slave labour in the Cape that had driven them to trek inland but the British threat to their position of superiority over the African<sup>15</sup>.

In the certainty that they were God's chosen, the Boers lived out their lives as if they inhabited the pages of the Old Testament. The African was Ham, black son of Noah, cursed into slavery for eternity<sup>16</sup>. Their flight from the English was the Exodus of the Children of Israel, the Transvaal their Promised Land by covenant with God. To them all actions were justified, all brutality and bloodshed mandated—even ordained.

It was within this untenable sphere that Livingstone had hoped to settle and initiate stations manned by evangelists. The impossibility of the project had taken time to determine, but it had not been entirely unforeseen. When he had paid for his plot at Tshongwane, giving Sechele a gun and beads for the land, he had made a stipulation: that he be given equal land in any new location where he, Sechele and his people might choose to go if they were forced to leave.

A few months earlier, when he and the Bakwena faced the loss of their crops, Sechele had decided to plant in another location according to the custom when rains fail. Sechele had recommended a place called Kolobeng after a river that formed a broad plain where he believed his *moruti* might succeed with irrigation<sup>17</sup>. He had lived there once, in the days when he had few followers. It was 40 miles (60km) away in the direction of the Kalahari, but he was certain that the effort would be worthwhile. The Kolobeng River had never been known to stop flowing.

The Bakwena would sow corn (sorghum) and Livingstone would prepare a test garden of vegetables and wheat. The intention was to return to weed the gardens once or twice and then to harvest at the end of the season. Sechele had



Kgalagadi vassals living in the vicinity whom he said could be depended upon to guard it. Livingstone and the Bakwena dug and planted, but in the end there was no need to return to weed and reap. The Bakgalagadi had failed in their role as scarecrows, and everything was eaten up by buffaloes, rhino and waterbuck. Another harvest was lost, yet the idea of Kolobeng as an alternative to Tshongwane somehow survived.

In the meantime they remained where they were. However impossible it seemed, Livingstone was satisfied to have chosen a chief and people amenable to his efforts. Sechele was at the hub of the Tswana nation. Since the late seventeenth century, when the ancestral clan had split into Kwena, Ngwaketse and Ngwato tribes, the Bakwena had retained the paramount chiefship. At harvest the first pumpkin must be eaten by the Kwena chief; in a hunting party of chiefs the breast of any game animal killed must be given to the Kwena chief. One could confidently expect that if the Bakwena were Christianised other Batswana would follow. It was simply unfortunate that Sechele was not chief of all the Bakwena, Livingstone noted. Neither he nor Bubi, Kgakge's uncle and regent, would have the upper hand until one of them was dead.

Sechele had achieved a great deal, nevertheless. In 1821, he had been a boy of only eleven when his father, Motswasele II, was murdered at Shokwane. He had been forced to flee for his own life<sup>18</sup>. He lived for years in exile, destitute and wandering the Kalahari and river regions as a hunter-gatherer with his mother and a few loyal servants. His innate strength was honed on deprivation; the force of his character sharpened on adversity. Eventually a few Bakwena accepted his authority, and he began the slow, piecemeal struggle to regain his birthright, the chiefship.

By the time he had settled at Tshongwane he had two thousand followers and suzerainty over the Bakgalagadi hunters of the thirstland who were expected to provide him an income in skins and feathers for trade. Nevertheless, as long as Bubi's people were settled at Dithubaruba on the edge of the thirstland, Sechele knew he would get meagre tribute from his Kgalagadi vassals. Then an extraordinary accident occurred that eliminated his arch rival. By the Tswana custom of gift-exchange between chiefs, Sechele sent Bubi some gunpowder that Bubi reasonably suspected of being charmed. Bubi set to work with incantations and smouldering herbs to dissolve its evil power—and the explosion that killed him and his counsellors was heard for miles.

Many of Bubi's people escaped to Sechele to avoid living under Kgakge, who had succeeded his regent, and Sechele invoked his right to demand the wives, children and possessions of the defectors. He would normally have made a show of force, but Kgakge knew that he would not in the presence of his missionary. Kgakge thus taunted his adversary, calling him a coward and threatening to attack him. Sechele seemed to bear the indignity for Livingstone's benefit, but eventually made his move. He borrowed an iron cooking pot and some salt from the Livingstones, telling them that he and his men were taking the pot and spears to hunt elephant<sup>19</sup>. Late that day the "hunters" returned. Amidst the cries of the wounded the mission couple also heard victory cheers, and realised the deception.



Thus Sechele became Paramount Chief of the Bakwena. His tactics for uniting his people had succeeded. He took pride in his ascendancy, and retired momentarily from Livingstone's influence. He openly carried out the rites of Chief Rainmaker, ignoring Livingstone's silent consternation. He allowed his people to stay away from worship services which he normally ordered them to attend. Livingstone, whether for retribution or to prevent bloodshed, declined to mend his guns and hand over gunpowder that a hunter, Gordon Cumming, had left for him.

Yet the old affinity between teacher and protege scarcely faltered. They were soon absorbed once more in discussion; the pupil admiring his tutor's wisdom, the tutor gratified with his pupil's comprehension. Belief was kindled in the unbeliever, and Livingstone turned his thoughts to Sechele's baptism. Only the chief's wives could prevent it. The missionary would not baptise a polygamist.

Livingstone did not preach on the subject. He relied on Bible study and the example he and his assistants set through their own monogamous marriages. Sechele would have to find an answer for the dilemma himself. He was well aware that his marital state fell short of the Christian ideal. In frustration, he lamented that the white man had come too late, after he was already "entangled in the meshes of customs!"<sup>20</sup>. The injustice upset him, but he believed he had a solution. He would go abroad to study, rest from the responsibilities of his office, read the Bible in peace, and then years later he would return in the hope that his wives would have despaired and remarried!

Livingstone wished it were that simple, even for his own sake. If Sechele could rid himself of his supernumerary wives, his senior wife *Mma-Sebele* would be left, and she was the least suitable for a marriage of Christian partnership. When Sechele ordered her to attend worship she resisted, and then appeared in the meeting house almost naked to enjoy the consternation of her husband and the missionary. Sechele would then order her away to put on clothes, and she would stalk off with her chin jutting out in defiance.

The Bakwena showed Livingstone respect, nonetheless. When they disapproved of his ways they were frank, but his sense of humour carried him through when he might have felt offended. With real buoyancy he reported that one of Sechele's elders had said, "We like you as well as if you had been born amongst us, but we wish you would give up that everlasting preaching and praying!"<sup>21</sup>. He would not stop preaching to please his detractors, but he did preach in the plainest language possible for those who sat gossiping and fidgeting. Sechele said he was annoyed with their stupidity, and told Livingstone that the only solution was to thrash them. A *thupa* of rhinoceros hide was just the thing to "make them all believe together!"<sup>22</sup>.

Another instance occurred in which Sechele combined his Christian zeal with heathen custom. He had a reputation for dealing harshly with suspected sorcerers, and realised that it might provide an asset for his new Christianity. He asked Livingstone to assure him that he would gain salvation if he "acted justly, fairly avoided fighting, treated both his own people and strangers kindly, killed witches and prayed to God!"<sup>23</sup>



Of those who opposed Livingstone on the grounds of custom the rain diviners caught and held his attention. In arguments over belief and superstition he noticed how thoughtful and astute they often were. When he employed dialectic to win a point he found that they could be as proficient as he, and a battle of wits ensued. On one occasion he began the discussion by asking when the Bakwena had first tried to make rain:

Rain Doctor: When we first opened our eyes we found our forefathers making rain, and we follow in their footsteps.

Medical Doctor: I quite agree with you as to the value of the rain; but you cannot charm the clouds by medicines. You wait till you see the clouds come, then you use your medicines and take the credit which belongs to God only.

Rain Doctor: I use my medicines, and you employ yours; we are both doctors, and doctors are not deceivers. ...When a patient dies you don't give up trust in your medicine, neither do I when rain fails<sup>24</sup>.

Moffat was among the uncompromising missionaries who had good reason to avoid such discussions, while Livingstone relished confrontation and involvement. Standing among a crowd watching an old man make rain, Livingstone challenged him to make it fall solely on the mission gardens—and the onlookers were delighted to see the diviner's discomfiture. On another occasion a grizzled old rainmaker was burning herbs which were said to possess the power to "heal the clouds". Livingstone pointed out that the smoke was rising in one direction, while the clouds were moving away in the other—and the crowd was uproarious. Mockery was effective, but he did not like to use it. By and large he demonstrated his respect, and gained it in return.

Such was the nature of his work, taking one step forward and another back. He asked himself how he could plod ahead for ten years or more, as Moffat insisted that he must do, before there could be any hope of converts. How many would he have even then? How much beyond another man's accomplishment would he have gone by then? He could not work within a mould. He was a different sort than Moffat, the meticulous, thorough man of precise detail and practicalities who found his fulfilment, decade after decade, in the minutiae of translation, a workshop, a garden and conversation with the grandchildren of the people he had met half a lifetime before.

Livingstone warned the Bakwena that they must learn now because he would not always be with them<sup>25</sup>. He began to hone his principle that a missionary could demand cooperation. He considered the possibility of making a beginning and moving on even before converts were realised. The idea suited his temperament, which was strongly averse to tedium and repetition.

The month was March 1847. After he and Mary had arrived home from their exhausting and heartrending journey eastward they had been required to prepare almost immediately for a journey to Kuruman. The mission would remain in Mebalwe's hands, while Paul would come with them. Livingstone felt he should attend the forthcoming meeting of the District Committee. He would prefer to avoid it, but he had points to raise. Mary and Robert would enjoy a respite with the grandparents, and the child could be born where there were helping hands.



As they set out toward the south and crossed the dry bed of the Molopo, however, they both knew the most urgent reason for their going. They were almost destitute. Drought and the disruption of Livingstone's travels had left them again without any crop. They had added nothing to their supplies since Mary's mother had come six months earlier, and the beads they used to buy maize had long since been used up.

Their wagon rolled into the mission, and the Tlhaping women crowded round with excitement to greet Mary. In their fond recollection she was a plump, happy girl, full of health and energy; now they watched with dismay as a lean, drawn woman, heavy with child, climbed slowly down from the wagon. "Has he starved her?" they gasped. "Is there no food in the country to which she has been?"<sup>26</sup> In Livingstone's ears their alarm was exaggerated, but a ring of truth made him resent every word, and he never forgot their remarks.

When the time came he and Moffat went off to the mission at Dithakong to attend the meeting which Livingstone was certain would produce a favourable response to his proposal for a seminary. So convinced was he of the worth of the plan that he was stunned when it was rejected outright. Anyone else would have foreseen the outcome. He was young, a man with an empty record; his poor relations with Edwards had done him no good; and he was developing a reputation for arrogance. Among the Committee there were those who suspected that he wanted to set up a college in order to become its dean.

He had taken no account of the influence of the old order among the members. There were men who remained unconvinced of the worth of new, remote outposts and a seminary to provide Batswana to staff them. His vision was not merely insufficient; it was not even recognised. He needed diplomacy and, having none, had been roundly defeated. It is unfortunate that he had no way of knowing that years later his ideas would be adopted with enthusiasm.

He had to turn to the second reason for his being there. He wanted to claim reimbursement of his removal expenses. The Committee might have provided for his needs as a matter of course, he thought rather cynically, but if he had to make an issue of the matter, he was prepared to do so. Before he could make his case, however, a younger man stood up and pointed out that Livingstone had left Mabotsa without the authority of the Committee. The reproach angered Livingstone, who suddenly saw that there would be no reimbursement and walked out.

He returned to Kuruman not only defeated but desperate. He had insufficient money even to supply the basic needs of his family. He would have to borrow from Moffat. His dependency on Kuruman, coupled with the inadequacy of his beginning at Tshongwane, had become a humiliation. He wanted to be anywhere else but among the crowds at Kuruman at this moment. He longed to be in the solitude of the interior, away from people and committees. Yet even in this he was thwarted. The new baby was as late as the first one. It would appear, he remarked, that Mary carried a child for ten months instead of nine!

He was impatient, but he waited, humbly conceding the matter to God. Finally a little girl was born to the delight of everyone at Kuruman—and Livingstone most of all. They named her Agnes after his mother, and she was bonny. When



Mary was recovered and the baby could safely travel, they wended their way back to Tshongwane, a family increased in number to four.

They arrived at Tshongwane in July to find several Boer farmers loitering about the place. It was obvious that they had kept a surveillance of Sechele, but seemed to be as curious as they were suspicious. Mebalwe reported that they had behaved peaceably and attended all of his services. To Livingstone they were still trespassers, and he felt like clearing them off, but was particularly cautious because of a rumour. The Boers thought he had called in traders to sell guns and ammunition to Sechele, and they had already confiscated the wagons of one of them, Joseph McCabe.

It was time for Livingstone to bring his affairs at Tshongwane to a conclusion. Any chance to build something worthwhile there was gone or had never existed. The realisation brought back the feeling that injustice had been worked against him, and the irrational conviction that he was being driven out. In the main, however, there was a kind of hollowness. He had spent a year and a half at Tshongwane, a little longer than he had been at Mabotsa, and with that investment had recorded his second failure.



## Chapter Three

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### The Building of Kolobeng 1847 - 1848

*One can sit in the yard—on the stone where the man treated his patients—and study the disordered ruins of the house at Kolobeng. Foundations of a lean-to kitchen and cook's fireplace. A confusion of rubble that was once a storeroom or workshop. An outline, which is all that remains, of the main house: sitting room, study, the bedroom where the children were born.*

*Photographs, yellowed with age, show walls that stood for sixty years before they crumbled. The sun-dried bricks they were made from were laid in precise English bond. The mind's eye provides the rest: an image of the man whitewashing the walls, putting up a roughhewn shelf, positioning a window frame that was carried from Mabotsa to Tshongwane and finally to Kolobeng, the last homestead on the edge of the interior and the last he would struggle to build.*

Leaving Mary and the children at Tshongwane, Livingstone set out in August of 1847 with Mebalwe and some of Sechele's people to start the work at Kolobeng. He took a wagon full of trees for planting, tools and window frames and enough food to last a few weeks. Men and oxen plodded through the sun-drenched, silent land to the west of what is now Ramotswa, where there is still a sense of peace and emptiness.

They camped and went on the next morning, approaching the scattered hills on the edge of the Kalahari where they had planted the previous year and would build and plant again. The Bakwena were carrying their bundles and hoes, cooking pots, seeds and children, though they might have stayed and eked out an existence at Tshongwane.

Now he would be able to breathe. The Boers of the Transvaal preferred to farm the fertile Marico River Valley. No other emigrants wanted to live so far from towns. Few besides himself knew the people and their language or cared to settle where there was nothing but the people—few resources, no "civilization" even within striking distance. He would succeed now, he was certain, in making a home for his family and an axis for stations that would radiate in all directions, he said, like the spokes of a wheel. "Itineracy is good if you have a permanent sphere, a focus"<sup>27</sup>.

As the wagons rounded a hill, they saw the water of the Kolobeng River tumbling down a rocky slope and flattening out onto a floodplain, 18 feet (5.4m) wide and 3 feet (90cm) deep in the middle. Reeds and tall grasses grew along its banks to enclose the meadowland that he would plant again this year with wheat and vegetables. At the base of the plain it narrowed and disappeared around a rocky bluff on its way to the Metsemotlhaba. From the point of the river's arch round the plain he would cut the canal for irrigation. Higher up and further on the people would build and plant with the rains—sorghum, maize, pumpkins and



beans. When they seemed ready to learn irrigation, he would extend the canal to water flat land further downstream.

The name Kolobeng referred to wild boars in the area at one time. Boars were no longer there, but there seemed to be almost every other species: bushbuck that came to the water's edge in the early hours, zebra and kudu that browsed the wooded hills; hyenas that barked at night. Rhinoceros could sometimes be seen from a distance and the profusion of broken saplings indicated elephants. There would be meat for his family and the Bakwena.

On the knoll above the river where there was a constant breeze and a good view Livingstone marked out a plot for his house. The valley below, the opposite bank and the hills beyond would be picturesque from the veranda. There was level ground at the back for an *uitspan* and a packhouse for the usual tools and boxes, harnesses and wagon parts. He did not intend to begin immediately but in the new year; a hut of poles and reed would suffice in the meantime. Mebalwe began his house, and marked out a place for Paul's that was big enough for all his children<sup>28</sup>.

Mebalwe and some of the other assistants had seen straight-sided mud houses among the circular Tswana houses at Kuruman; none had ever expected to live in one until now, when Livingstone encouraged everyone to do as he pleased. Within days, a cluster of "square" houses sprang up that were the envy of everyone who had begun building on the round. Modukanele, the wagon driver, was so pleased with his "European" house that he vowed he would never leave it.

Everyone quickly had a roof over his head, and then everything else seemed to be needed at once. The meeting house took priority, and Sechele insisted on being the patron of the undertaking, declaring that it would be "a house for God which is the defence of my town"<sup>29</sup>. He pictured a huge, stone-built structure with hardwood beams and windows that opened, like the one at Kuruman, but Livingstone tactfully dissuaded him in favour of a simple temporary structure. Sechele consented, and sent his work gangs out every day to gather base-stones and poles for the mud walls and grass for the roof.

The raising took place on a Saturday in September 1847, when more than two hundred people gathered in a jostle of excitement to build the *monare's* God House. Sechele announced that it would be bigger than anything they had seen, a house of such great importance that it would bear no relation to the sleeping huts and grain bins that it was the province of women to build. And men would do the work!

The dimensions were to be 20 feet (6m) by 40 feet (12m), but Livingstone discovered that the roof poles had been cut too short. To avoid delay and to hold the enthusiasm of the crowd, he quickly adjusted the width of the building to 15 feet (4.5m). Workers positioned foundation stones and placed wall supports in holes at intervals, tamping earth firmly round them. They laced branches and twigs between the uprights, and bound roof members to these with bark fibre.

Next morning the outline of a building stood on the hill for Sunday worship, the dawn light shining through its unfinished walls. It shone beautifully above the new Kwenana town, and from a distance it was splendid. The "God House" had risen to gather the people, and Livingstone was inspired by the accomplishment.



They could begin now, he wrote to Moffat, to "labour for the meat which perisheth"<sup>30</sup>. By Tuesday the walls had been filled in and thatching begun under the stern eye of Mebalwe.

The meeting house at Kolobeng was significant. It was a co-operative venture of marked success among the endeavours of the early missions, and Livingstone's leadership had inspired it. What he could not know was that the temporary church cum school would never be replaced by the permanent structure intended. The congregation of converts he envisaged for its rebuilding in brick with glass windows would not be seen while the Bakwena were settled at Kolobeng. The peak of Kwena enthusiasm had already been reached, and would not be sustained for long. Livingstone, as he stood among his people in the first church in the remotest settlement in southern Africa, had no way of foreseeing another failure.

He threw himself into the work that remained. The planting season had arrived and he must create the subsistence that he and Mary had been denied at Tshongwane. For this he had to excavate a canal and build a dam. If they were done as simply as possible they would still be an enormous project. At least his workers would not expect pay. Sechele had agreed wholeheartedly to provide labour for the canal and dam in exchange for Livingstone's supervision of a big "European house" for him.

The canal was dug 3 feet (90cm) wide, 4 feet (1.2m) deep, and several hundred feet long, by a gang of forty men and not a single iron tool. Livingstone's only spade had a broken handle. They reverted to Setswana methods, using sharpened sticks for digging and wooden bowls and tortoise shells for scooping. The earth was hauled away by a team of sixty-five younger men without any conveyance or bucket: karosses, like hammocks, held the soil as they carried it to the dam site. They worked harder than the Bakgatla at Mabotsa, and Livingstone himself felt more incentive than he had felt in the untenable environment of Tshongwane.

He worked all day in the blazing sun to encourage the others by example, and got so sunburned that he was nearly forced to abandon the project. Nevertheless, the canal was finished within days and he watched it fill with water. He planted the apricot and olive trees from Kuruman that had been replanted twice already. Not knowing what the soil would grow, he sowed every variety of vegetable he could, from carrots to wurzel, and felt grateful that friends and acquaintances had continued to send seeds. He put in sorghum and maize to diversify, but it was too late to sow wheat. It was the third planting since they had seen any harvest.

To vary their livestock he tried goats, but they were prone to skin disease. Sheep did well, but cattle would still be the mainstay—for meat, milk, trading and draught. He had nine paid workers, who had agreed to a heifer each for their work and would accept no other payment. Reminding them how long it might be until he could get more cattle, they insisted that they would gladly wait a year.

When Sechele celebrated the completion of his coveted "town house" on the broad crest of the hill above the mission, Livingstone gave him an internal door and sold him a window<sup>31</sup>. The chief was so pleased that he tried to make another door with the skin of a rhinoceros that ventured into the town, but it was no good.





*The unfinished church at Kolobeng*



Livingstone himself had hung a skin as a temporary measure, but hyenas had dragged it away!

As the work progressed, with labouring gangs everywhere, the ring of the hammer and the sound of work chants in the wind, Kgalemela the under-sawyer lent light relief. He was an expert, he said, from *Kudumane* where he had been taught by the great *Moshete* himself! Certainly his bravery at roof height was never in dispute for, while the Bakwena trembled above wall height, Kgalemela alone could place a roof tree without flinching.

It was still September, and Livingstone was working swiftly to complete enough of the work to bring his family from Tshongwane. He had removed so much timber before he left that he referred to the place as “the ruins”, and was well aware that Mary could barely endure the long weeks alone. She had sent word that lions, sensing the abandonment, had begun prowling at night, and she was afraid that she could not keep up her spirits for much longer. He worked harder and longer hours. The stress increased, and was fuelled by challenge. He favoured his weak left arm, but strained it repeatedly. He cut himself with an axe. On one occasion he found himself dangling from a beam by his weak arm; and on another he actually fell, hurting himself badly.

He had not been trained as a carpenter, land surveyor, bricklayer, blacksmith or joiner, and his obvious aptitude for new skills never lightened his work. The mid-day sun had the weight of an anvil, and the glare rang behind his eyes like a hammer. He had headaches for the first time in his life. To escape sunstroke and heat exhaustion he covered himself from head to foot, never stood motionless out of doors, and did all his heavy work in the early morning and late evening. He also knew the importance of a measured, steady pace.

He ran out of nails, and lost patience with people at home who prided themselves on their support of the missions and then sent out the most useless supplies:

Some worthy has sent us a lot of nails I imagine are meant for nailing lead onto roofs, thick cast-metal things of about half an inch in length. I think I must sow them in the garden, and if they do not grow longer my vexation will go with them into oblivion<sup>32</sup>.

He eked out time each day to teach as well as build, because congregations were good, and the people were beginning to respond. He was immersed in the language and lives of the Bakwena, and reported that his speech was so “Sitchuanaized” that he doubted he could deliver a sermon in English. Exhausted in body long before nightfall, his mental energy was unabated, and he fought sleep as he had in his factory days, reading and writing letters while the wind through hut walls blew dust and sand into his ink. Mary would despair of house-keeping, he said, but the wind through the reeds flickered his candle into “glorious icicles” as he listened to sounds of the river with an optimism he had never felt before.

They have nightingales in England, but of all the birds in the world commend me to the merry midnight frogs..., the sound of waters at night, irrigateable water too<sup>33</sup>.



The exertion and challenge made him a little giddy. Missionaries, he claimed in a letter, ought not to be “down in the Colony”. They should be right up here “riding on the world’s back bone, and snuffing like zebras the free pure delightful air of the great western desert!”<sup>34</sup> It actually suited him that they were not anywhere near the desert, and he was capable of ignoring the proximity of Edwards and another missionary named Inglis, who had chosen to ride the world’s backbone with less self-congratulation.

Interspersed with euphoria were moments of intense anger. An underlying rancour had grown from the dry ground of lost harvests, poverty and the constant necessity to begin again—the backbreaking labour of it all. He became increasingly preoccupied with Edwards, the quarrel that had never died in his memory. It was like an old wound giving pain in damp weather. He asked Moffat for a bell for the meeting house and added, “Mr Edwards might give us his bell for any use he makes of it.” He dwelt with satisfaction on news that the Bakgatla had left Mabotsa after he departed, though he must have known that they had only gone to their lands for a season. He remarked, “The chief lives out at a cattle post, & nobody comes to meeting except to annoy”<sup>35</sup>.

Within a few weeks his mood would swing and sink his good spirits. Biographer Ransford has identified the pattern as that of the manic-depressive<sup>36</sup>. Vision and inspiration visited Livingstone in solitude, but instability accompanied them. Mary had always had a calming effect on him, but she was not there. When she arrived the flights of fancy would subside, the visionary optimism recede, and a steadier, more responsible energy emerge. Problems and practicalities would immediately become more manageable.

He had begged nails from Moffat, but still needed more. He decided to go back to Tshongwane to collect his family and salvage nails at the same time. He would have to burn the timber to get the nails, but he had already planned to destroy the house and school to prevent Boers from taking up residence in them. He had not forgotten finding them on the mission when he returned from Kuruman, tormenting Paul’s wife until she hid from them, and letting their children run about scavenging roots as if they owned the place. He had no doubt that they would make themselves entirely at home if he left a stick standing.

At Tshongwane he set fire to the house, throwing on everything that he could not load onto the wagon, then collected nails from the charred rubble, yoked the ox wagon for Mary and saddled his horse. He did not mention his loss, or hers, at seeing the house go up in flames. He would have far stronger ties than these before he would allow himself to look back with sadness when no particular purpose could be served by sentiment.

It was late September as the wagon pulled up the mission hill and Mary caught sight of the impressive, “European aspect” of things. They bore to the right and halted at the *uitspan* to unload. Clusters of new Tswana houses could be seen higher up with new grass roofs and freshly plastered *malwapa*. She was pleased with their prospects, and highly relieved to be away from Tshongwane, but the dust-laden wind blew harder each day without moisture. At Kolobeng she found her hands were always dirty, and there was grit everywhere, on shelves and



books, the children's faces and even in the food. By January it was obvious that drought had settled with them and only irrigation would keep their crops alive.

Much of the water in the ditches evaporated before it could reach the rows. Soil watered by hand was dry in less than an hour. The ground was so hard that it had to be dug with a mattock and every row had to be protected by a shade of grass-thatch propped on twigs. Some plants survived in a weakened condition only to be finished off by mice at night or insects in the daytime. Livingstone said he would replant the cabbage and turnips at the beginning of winter when the sun was less intense and insects less prevalent.

Eye infections were the scourge of every dry season, and they persisted now because there was no rain to lay the dust. The baby's eyes became sore and filled with matter, and she cried with the pain. Then Mary's eyes became infected and she could hardly see, could tolerate no light and had to remain inside with a blanket covering the door. Livingstone diagnosed purulent ophthalmia—conjunctivitis—which he treated with silver nitrate, despite not having clean rain water with which to dilute it.

Young Robert perpetually clung to health by the slenderest thread. His father, never unwell, suffered fatigue so profound that he felt ill. The pendulum of his moods, extreme during his solitude, swung now despite Mary's presence. He became despondent, and fell into inertia. He refused even to think about beginning the new house, however desperately they needed it. He said he would wait for the heat to break in March when he might be able to marshall enough energy for another drive of work. Respite from building unfortunately provided no respite from overwork. Everywhere he looked, something needed to be done.

When Mary and the children were somewhat improved he prescribed the best medicine he knew for himself—a change of scene. "Itinerating" was good therapy, he maintained, and the country of the Batswana, with its dry, clear air could produce a cure as good as that of any sanatorium! He wrote to Moffat and prescribed the same treatment, to come and join him on a search for the lake, though he knew that Moffat was hardly likely to interrupt his translations. Livingstone then thought of retrieving the neglected project of placing Paul with Mokgatle, chief of the Bafokeng. There were reports that Mokgatle was so intimidated by the Boers that he was on the point of leaving his land<sup>37</sup>. His last hope of security was the presence of a teacher.

The plan was for Paul and Isaac to accompany him, while Mary, tired of traveling, remained at home. Then a desperate message arrived by runner from Roualeyn Gordon Cumming, the "mad Scotsman" whom the Livingstones had welcomed as he passed through on his way to hunt elephants. Gordon Cumming had got well into the *tsetse* belt and lost all his oxen, and Livingstone realised that the whole party might perish. So his own oxen were sent north instead of drawing his supply wagon to Magaliesberg. After that, when he might have made his departure, the dam broke and he had to repair it to conserve his dwindling supply of water. He seemed hopelessly tied.

In February of 1848 he finally got away, with Sechele accompanying him on a pack ox and carrying a gun to "shoot for the pot". Sechele often deferred his status as chief to serve Livingstone. It seemed to give him pleasure. He enjoyed



the trek for the wanderlust it satisfied, something he may have inherited from his forefather, Motswasele I, a great traveller. Touring also gave him an opportunity to meet other *dikgosi* and make use of the prestige he gained through association with Livingstone.

After the flat, heat-baked land southeast of Kolobeng they passed with relief into the black earth valleys along the Marico. It was little wonder that the Boers had claimed the whole area. White travellers made a point of stopping at the prosperous farms to buy milk and butter. It is doubtful that Sechele would have flaunted his gun among the Boers, and he took the opportunity to depart at this point. Encountering a party of Batswana going in the opposite direction to visit him, he turned back to receive them at his *kgotla*.

Despite Livingstone's own poor relations with the Boers, he made a distinction between the younger ones, often roughshod and illiterate, and the older, more principled men who were closer to Dutch tradition. Some were his friends, and he spoke highly of their hospitality. Eager enough to earn a rix dollar in most ways, they never asked a traveller to pay for bed and board.

The party arrived at the farm of his friend Johannes Pretorius and were warmly received. There were differences between Livingstone and his host, nevertheless, and the visit abruptly soured when Livingstone saw four Mapela children hovering in the farmhouse kitchen<sup>38</sup>. To Pretorius and his wife they were simply bound servants who were fed, clothed and taught to work in what was surely the best opportunity of their lives. To Livingstone they were captives acquired in raids on African settlements, or when Boer hunters abducted children from their tribal homes to hold them to ransom or carry them away to use as free farm labour<sup>39</sup>. A farmer could get eleven years of work from a girl and seventeen from a boy.

Livingstone refrained from mentioning the children to Pretorius, while his Tswana companions quietly told them to make their way to the missionary's wagon camp on the Sabbath and they would be returned to their families. The youngsters were petrified with fear. They had tried repeatedly to get away, and had always been forced back to Myneer Pretorius, they said, by Mokgatle, who was trying desperately to survive in an area controlled by Boers. It was suddenly obvious to Livingstone that the very chief who had asked for Christian teaching was so intimidated that he compromised the lives of his people. Livingstone left in a worse state of despondency than he had suffered before he came.

He was on his way home when an incident occurred that improved his disposition. He and Paul were walking next to the wagon when they came upon a female rhinoceros with calf—a dangerous situation. Enraged by the sight of the wagon, the huge animal charged. The two men were in a hopeless position, their guns out of reach in the wagon. They dived into a ditch that proved to be downwind and lay motionless. It was a narrow escape, and the experience swung Livingstone's mood upwards, as it had in the incident with the lion.

Out of despondency came elation, and he was ready for new work and a new challenge. When he arrived back at Kolobeng he intended to concentrate on building the new house and making enough progress in evangelism that he could get away again to explore the possibilities of expanding in another direction. He



would try to free himself for a long absence or a series of absences. He was not at all convinced that a missionary must be present among his people at all times.

There were others in need. No one had got past Sekgoma of the Bangwato to find the lake and the people there or Chief Sebetwane who was known to have settled with thousands of followers. Missionaries must be the first to arrive, he believed, to create a foundation for Christianity before the advent of traders and the unscrupulous. Whether Moffat would join him or not, he would go.

His greatest problem was the expense of such an ambitious expedition. He could live and travel very cheaply, but expense could not be avoided altogether. Most of those who might be interested in joining him could afford to fit out an expedition better than he. From Kolobeng he wrote to Thomas Steele, mentioning Oswell's gift of a wagon. At the same time he told Oswell he would wait for him instead of going with Steele, though if obliged to wait too long he might go with anyone "having his face in that direction"<sup>40</sup>. Clearly he was not above using the rivalry among adventurers to gain his own ends.

He turned to the matter of the new house and was pleased with the site he had chosen. It was on a low, rocky bluff that he hoped would discourage termites. "White ants" had attacked both beams and woodwork at Tshongwane. He began substantial, 18-inch (45cm) foundations to carry a structure 20 feet (6m) by 52 feet (15.6m)<sup>41</sup>. It would be big enough for visitors, provide a good roof space to gather heat out of the rooms below and be grand in the eyes of the African, to impress him with the wisdom and strength of the missionary.

In the proportions and style of the house he was copying the Kuruman design that had been copied in turn from the houses of the first settlers in the Cape. At the front there would have to be a veranda; inside, a combination work and sitting room called a *voorhuis*. To the left there would be a study for Livingstone's writing, and on the right two bedrooms.

He would build a central fireplace for the cold months but beyond that there would be few refinements. He had no intention of building entirely in stone as at Kuruman or laying the same quarried rock foundations as at Mabotsa. It would be sufficient to lay large, straight-sided stones to waist height and then revert to an easier material, mud. Even then he would have to lay "every brick and stick" himself if he wanted walls that were plumb and corners square<sup>42</sup>. He was starting again for the third time in less than three years, and he was tired of building. Nor did he envisage recreating the standard of permanence Edwards had set at Mabotsa. His injury, no matter how much he denied it, was a serious handicap, and his motivation in general was seriously diminished<sup>43</sup>.

With the stone foundations in place he turned to mud, but had already decided not to layer it wet as he had at Mabotsa. The path from the river was too steep to carry anything as leaden as wet mud. His work crew would make bricks as they had at Tshongwane and, even without firing them, the work would extend into weeks<sup>44</sup>. The moulds he had salvaged from Tshongwane were few, and he would have to go through the whole laborious process of felling trees and sawing the timber into boards to make moulds. The earth was eventually dug, however, and mixed to consistency. Hundreds of bricks lay on the riverbank in concentric arcs drying in the sun.





*Building the house at Kolobeng*



He had bought roof beams from two Boer farmers who had a long, two-man pitsaw where one man stood below and the other above ground. With trusses and joists in place, the roof was turned over to Mebalwe for thatching in reed secured with rawhide, and Livingstone secured the ridge with salvaged metal. They made a ceiling of reed and then coated it thickly with mud on the upper surface to keep dirt and insects from falling out of the thatch into their rooms in stormy weather, but also to provide what the Afrikaners called a *brandvas* against fire in the thatch. In an emergency the dry mud would hold flames back for a few precious minutes while they rescued children and belongings.

At Mabotsa his first house had cost £25. At Kolobeng, which was so remote that everything was either expensive or unobtainable, he had used salvaged materials and cut most of his own timber which was considerably cheaper. Yet he had not been able to afford even that expenditure. Now he heard that the District Committee would allow him a grant of £30 to defray his costs—but for Tshongwane, not Kolobeng. As if to demonstrate that no goodwill was intended, they complained that they were violating Society policy in order to oblige his eccentric needs: he had been in breach of regulations in not applying formally for assistance! He cared nothing for their approval or disapproval, and would rather have gone hungry than ask for help. Still, he was glad to receive the Tshongwane expenses. Somehow he had to pay his workers at Kolobeng.

From Kuruman he got more window glass, and repaired the eight-paned windows that had broken as he removed them from Tshongwane. Sometime after the main house was complete he built a lean-to kitchen for Mary. It was smaller and less substantial than her mother's kitchen, but far better than the usual cook's hut. Too many women depended upon servants, her mother insisted, and reaped their just reward in stolen property: a woman must have an integral kitchen for her own convenience and to prevent servants from pilfering<sup>45</sup>.

Their small, late harvest was in. The potatoes they had planted when other things had died were excellent, and their maize had yielded a fair crop. Livingstone intended to plant the new wheat crop with cattle manure. They still had hope of good gardens. With the bulk of the work out of the way he was already planning a few refinements for their new abode. He would make a bread oven for Mary, who patiently baked all their bread in a lidded pot heaped with coals. There was a termite hill near the house that would make an excellent oven, better insulated than anything he could construct, he said. It needed only a hole knocked through and then a good iron door.

For himself he would build a smithy. The heat of a charcoal fire and glowing metal was more than he could endure with only the scanty shade of a mimosa against the cloudless sky. He planned to sink stout poles into the ground to erect a reed roof without walls so that the wind could get through for coolness. A stone base would hold the heavy goatskin bellows at waist height.

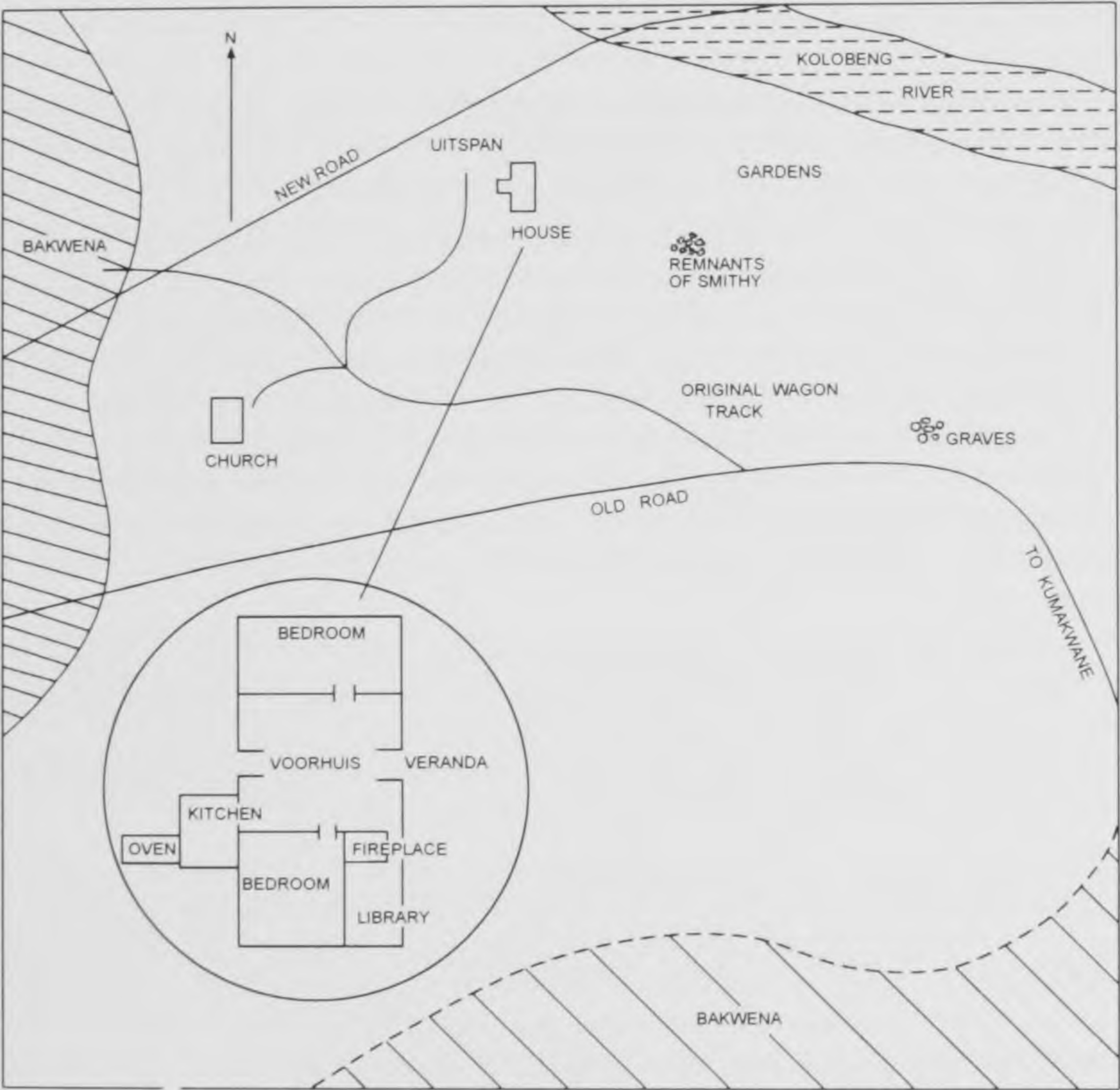
There was not much left to make the mission a functioning, self-sufficient establishment, unless it was a workshop. The light work of shoe repair and gun-mending required a place close to the house. Robert Moffat, like his wife, had discovered the necessity of keeping things close at hand. If precious tools were stolen they were not easily replaced, and one's life literally depended on tools<sup>46</sup>.



The only loss of tools Moffat had sustained since he had built a workshop was in providing Livingstone with a good part of his stock!

On 4 July 1848 he and Mary took the children and all their possessions out of the hut and settled down in the big, airy house. Some things remained unfinished, but it hardly mattered. They could live without plaster until there was more water to make it. "The river that never dried up" had diminished to a trickle, and all Livingstone could do for the moment was to apply a skim-coat of mud to the walls and whitewash the uneven result. He set to work making shelves, not knowing that there would never be enough water for plaster.

They were settled at last, a family with a real home and the expectation of staying. He put a metal plate onto one wall as a kind of commemoration. "That house is an evidence that I tried to introduce Christ's gospel into that country", he wrote years later while engaged in the trying task of rewriting his Kolobeng journal after it had been destroyed along with the house<sup>47</sup>. For David and Mary Livingstone in that July of 1848 there could have been no forewarning of crisis and upheaval, only hardship and hope and the desire to bring the Word of God to people who had never heard it.



*Kolobeng site map with house layout*



## Chapter Four

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### Hardship and Hope 1848

*One can cross the valley to the hill behind the mission and the ravine called Makyalabarabala, where water ran down to the Kolobeng and made a natural boundary between the Bakwena and Bakaa. The stream disappeared in drought, leaving a gully of loose pebbles that skitter down and strike like flints at the base. It was said that the Kolobeng itself would never dry up, but it did, and David Livingstone—like the people—dug a pit in the river bed, covered it with logs to protect children and animals and waited while a little water collected at the bottom.*

*Even today fields have been put to the hoe, but the rains have failed, and the people have gone away with their land unsown. Gaunt cattle raise dust around the mission ruins, and the ragged herdboys have sore eyes and racking coughs. The land is as barren as the rock garden below the mission house, where nothing grows anymore.*

By mid-1848 the family had settled, and Livingstone had achieved the base he wanted for a broader influence. The building was done, the turning point reached. All that had gone before, he said, had been preparatory.

Yet almost before the memory of backbreaking labour had faded he discovered how difficult evangelism could be when it became one's primary occupation. It was harder than wielding a trowel or an adze, teaching men to make a decent mortice and tenon joint or build a wall that would stand plumb. Teaching old folk was nearly impossible, he discovered, because they always credited their longevity to medicine or said that they would be foolish to look for "another saviour" now! When he sought out the able-bodied he found himself preaching to women. Men could hold council or be consulted but not taught; that was beneath their dignity. There was even conflict over the concept of truth on which teaching rested.

He still lacked time and concentration, even while no longer building. If he ventured into the Kwenena town hours might be consumed in chance encounters. Everyone wanted the *ngaka's* advice, a chance to beg, an opportunity for a meandering conversation. How was his health? His wife's? His children's? How were his cattle? What was the latest word from *Moshete*?

Even time gained in delegating work to his assistants he gave back to them in full measure. He tutored Paul, Isaac and Mebalwe sporadically in theology, calling it his "chair in Divinity". His teaching was a morning task before the work of maintenance, repair and farming intervened to consume most of the day. By mid-morning, if he was not ploughing, he was cobbling or repairing the maize mill. He had to mend everything himself, from wagon wheels to locks and hinges, guns, harnesses, windows, and even the tools themselves. When he was at the forge a curious crowd gathered, and there would always be someone with an



iron hoe for him to weld. Then there was the dam to keep up and the health of the cattle and horse to maintain. He finished even later than usual if he had a Bible class in Sechele's town. Then there would be letters of pleading or appreciation to write. He and his kind, he said, were "the working clergy and no mistake"<sup>48</sup>.

He put time and thought into deciding the best way to influence, with some surprising results. He assigned Kgalemela to the task of calling everyone to the meeting house when it was time for prayers, and the man nearly rang the bell off its handle, shouting all the while, loudly enough to put fear into everyone on the hill: "Knock that woman down over there! Strike her, she is putting on her pot! Do you see that one hiding herself? Give her a good blow!"<sup>49</sup>

Kgalemela's name meant "scold", and it was appropriate! Livingstone had to ask him to desist. Tswana techniques of punishment and intimidation were at hand, tried and tested tools of tradition, but Livingstone resisted them in favour of the long, hard road to free will among the people and the hope of personal commitment to the Saviour.

He was thankful for small graces. The Bakwena found keeping the Sabbath entirely agreeable. They liked to leave their hunting and weeding for a day to sit in the *kgotla* or join him in the meeting house. It was then that he worked hardest at teaching. Occasionally, however, he rode to Manyana to preach to the Bahurutshe beneath the big *motlhatsa* tree that still stands there. Sometimes his family went with him. They kept no holidays except Easter and sometimes even lost track of the date, but there were two occasions that might have been called outings. They looked more like major expeditions, of course, with wagon, chief, chief's wagon and entourage, and a throng of servants and the curious trailing along behind.

First they had gone west to Logageng when the children needed fresh air to cure the protracted whooping cough that still lingered. He had been intrigued by Sekwena stories of a cave called Lepolole, and sighted it high up on the hill face, a gaping black hole everyone said was the home of God. No one, they believed, had ever been inside and come out alive, so he promptly clambered up the slope with a few sweating and chattering men close behind him to prepare an exploration inside. Reaching the mouth, every exuberant soul fell back in fear except Sechele, who shouldered a ladder and a load of ropes and lamps and went in with Livingstone, despite the din of apprehension that rose behind them. What would become of their *kgosi* and the *monare*? A smell of bat droppings assailed the suffering spectators as silent minutes ticked by. Finally the two adventurers emerged unscathed, to proclaim the power of Christian faith—Livingstone expressing his disappointment that the cave had been quite shallow and uninteresting!

Some time after that they went north in the direction of the Ngotwane River to see, at Matsieng, the rock said to have been soft at the beginning of the world when one-legged Lowe, the ancestral Tswana giant, climbed out of a hole leaving the mark of his foot behind.

There were no other outings in all the years at Kolobeng, for work took precedence. When the missionary opened his door in the morning the sick and lame were already there. He was so much in demand as a physician that he



could easily have devoted all of his time to the work. They came with any of a dozen complaints, the despair of childlessness or faith that he could cure the aches and blindness of old age. Medicines were the great panacea. When he gave them advice, they hardly listened, and waited instead for him to produce something from his worn box of drawers and bottles, jars and vials.

Purgatives seemed to be the favourite medicine, for the violence of their action inspired confidence in a complete cure. Livingstone, the *ngaka*, knew that traditional doctors relied on similar purgatives, emetics and suggestion, so he conserved his precious medicines and concocted placebos—"bread pills" as he and Mary referred to them at home. He ran low on medicines nevertheless, and the Society received a piteous testimonial from a missionary whose resources were stretched to the limit:

I have spent every farthing I have in the world—worked hard and fared hard—and am not ashamed to say that I am in debt £29 for building expenses.... If in consistency with your financial plans may I be favoured with £5 or £10 of medicines?<sup>50</sup>

He noted that certain diseases were seasonal and varied in severity according to a cycle of years. He was fascinated to hear of an indigenous inoculation against smallpox, which called for great courage because it could kill a whole village. When he realised, however, that he was becoming absorbed with medical discoveries and analysis he remembered becoming so fascinated with anatomy as a student that he was distracted from all other pursuits. He would not allow this to happen again.

He would restrict his practice to severe cases, become a specialist in a sense. When a Kwena woman's birth labour produced complications he was sometimes summoned by a Kwena attendant that had become so frightened she overcame the taboo against a man's presence at birth. Once, on the earthen floor of a hut, he delivered a woman of twins and saved the lives of the woman and both babies. Then he was besieged with patients because everyone was amazed at his abilities.

Biographers have questioned his decision not to pursue medicine more diligently or base his evangelism more solidly upon it. He was afraid that medicine would make him a plodder, and that was a consequence he felt he must avoid at all costs. He was a scientist at heart, though, and never stopped taking an empirical interest in everything around him: rock formations, soil and patterns of rainfall, vegetation and species of insects and game animals; Setswana language structure and custom; the diet of the people, their diseases and those of their domestic animals.

He had almost no time for reading, less than he had found when he was a piecer in the mills. He could read on horseback, oxback or in a wagon, but not at home, where everything demanded his attention. Observation became his source of information and amusement. Mental escape was as valuable as manual work was tedious.

He noticed patterns. Talking to old people, he learned that the Bakwena had possessed thousands of head of cattle during the chiefship of Sechele's father and had supported them along rivers that were now dry. Moffat had corroborated



the information: nine rivers that had flowed in 1824 had disappeared, and Livingstone began to develop his theory of the desiccation of southern Africa.

While he performed as much work in a day as any craftsman, and his habit of reading fell by the wayside, he still found time at night and on the Sabbath to write long, descriptive letters, nearly four hundred in four years at Kolobeng. He also produced papers and articles for publication on such varied themes as racial policy, missionary life and the Boers. Eventually he prepared an excellent grammar and lexicon of Setswana though, by his own admission, he actually spoke the language with the accent of a Scots Highlander. He kept an extensive journal that later served as the basis for a vivid published narrative of his experiences. Against the Kolobeng backdrop, the writing was amazingly prolific, the yield of a creative impulse that shone through his overwork. The achievement denied, with every vivid, eight-paged letter, the callouses on the hands that held pen and paper.

Livingstone's life at Kolobeng was a rich flow of mental activity running parallel to practical and evangelistic pursuits. For Mary, on the other hand, every day was a relentless stream of practicalities. She rose at dawn to light the fire for cooking and dress the children, boil water for maize porridge for family and servants, sit down for family worship, move on to early chores.

By the time the main work of the day had begun she was at the helm of everything in the house and dooryard, a "maid-of-all-work" as Livingstone put it; he was a "jack-of-all-trades" in the workshop and gardens<sup>51</sup>. Every day kept her busy with cooking, sweeping and scrubbing. The dirtiest clothes were soaked overnight. Floors had to be smeared at least occasionally, bedding aired, coffee roasted and ground, grain winnowed, cleaned and milled. She mixed and kneaded dough, raised it twice and baked it. She skimmed the cream from milk and churned butter.

Their primitive conditions produced work enough to keep a full complement of servants busy, but Mary never had more than the driver's wife and some women from the town—one at a time for a few months each of work. They never seemed to learn anything properly, but it was her mother's arrangement for helping the Tswana women, not the household. Christian teaching must be supported with skills for better living: hygiene, house cleaning, nutrition and child care.

Mary could rarely turn a task over to her helpers. She knew she had to be "at the beginning, middle and end of everything, everywhere"<sup>52</sup>. If ever she gained time, she gave it back as David did. When she had a few moments she would plod ahead with teaching the helper to read and write. She was very good at teaching and the language. Her conversational command of Setswana, if not her analytical grasp of its structure, was better than her husband's.

While he rested after the mid-day meal, she freed herself from housework to teach the Kwenā children. Books and slate in hand, she left Robert and Agnes in the care of the nurse-girl and trudged up the hill to the meeting house, bonneted against the blazing sun of early afternoon, her long skirt sweeping up the dust and pebbles of the gully that runs across the path. A ragtag throng of urchins watched her approach in the odd garments that were now familiar to all of them.



They loved *Mma-Robert*. She was strict but caring. They knew they must come on time or she would make them go and fetch water as a punishment. They knew that they must wear the shirts and frocks she demanded or she would send them away. A clutch of strings below their waists—*tshega* for boys and *lokgabe* for girls—was no longer enough. They would sit on the earthen floor, desperate to dash away and tear off the hated clothing, but were soon caught up in her number rhymes and the alphabet song that had been set to the tune of Auld Lang Syne.

After the lesson she stayed to teach the girls sewing, then walked into the town to talk to the women and distribute what she could spare to those who were most in need. Since the rains had failed, the people had very little and hunger always struck hardest at mothers and children. At home at dusk, she bathed Robert and Agnes without benefit of a bathtub, put them to bed, and took out her work basket while David sat writing at the table. She sometimes asked him to add a word of greeting or thanks from her in his letter, and often an apology that she could not find time to write herself.

It is possible that Mary wrote many letters that we know nothing about, but it is more probable that she wrote almost none. She appears to have had little time or inclination for writing. While she was like her mother in many ways, she lacked her confidence and ease of expression. Mary Livingstone's reticence, it has been suggested, was the effect of domineering parents; of education that had been inadequate or disrupted; even of insecurity produced by boarding school at an early age.

There are a few references in her husband's letters to requests she made, and these reflect a frontier woman's preoccupations with necessities: soap, a comb, socks for David (for she had no time to knit), a bonnet (but the size, she said, was not very important). She invested long hours in sewing and making candles, but when time and energy ran out she turned to her mother at Kuruman with a plea for provisions. Her life was at least as difficult as the older woman's had been a generation earlier.

At first homesteading had seemed harder than she ever imagined. At Tshongwane, living in a half-finished house with anxiety over a sick baby and exhaustion from pregnancy and travel, she had been overwhelmed and bewildered. The wife of a clergyman, she had commented bitterly, was no more than "a domestic drudge"<sup>53</sup>. Yet there were no such expressions of resentment during her Kolobeng years. The family was more stable and, little by little, they were improving their life. She enjoyed accumulating the things that make a home, including her desk and furniture from Kuruman. Livingstone shared her enthusiasm to the point of extravagance. He ordered bed chamber candlesticks with snuffers from England and a sofa for the sitting room.

A stable and enduring relationship grew between them. They were supportive and fond of each other, affectionate and playful at times. "The native children", he remarked, "are fond of her, and maybe so am I"<sup>54</sup>. She had no kindred society of women, and what she might have had among Boer farm women or from Mrs Edwards she did not pursue. Still, in many ways she appears to have been content. She had an unusual ability to live in this way, denied companionship and



all the usual forms of leisure and comfort. She never saw her solitude as isolation nor the challenges she met every day as more than reasonable for the wife of a missionary. If David Livingstone was an individualist, so was she.

Livingstone acknowledged her special attributes. He called her "a heroine" and "the main spoke in the wheel", and there is ample evidence of her quiet courage. In Tshongwane days, she had crossed and recrossed the Limpopo in flood with the sick baby at her breast in the wagon. On another occasion she had stayed calm after discovering that the wagon was on fire—with gunpowder in it! She had once found a scorpion in her bed and held the pillow down on it while she called out for help. She had always been the one to walk barefoot through the darkened house at night, because David had once trodden on a snake and ever after refused to get up. When he had been in agony with a decaying tooth, she had pulled it out with "shoemaker's nippers", though the operation was quite beyond her strength and he shouted with the pain: there was simply no one else to do it.

Life at Kolobeng was fulfilling, but equally demanding and fraught with setbacks. She had begun to make real progress in teaching when she found she was pregnant again. She could not eat or rest properly. Unable to cope with the school, she withdrew, intending to return to it after the birth of the child, but in fact never did. Mary Livingstone would produce five children in six years and come close to death after two of the births. Childbearing would ruin her health and curtail her limited sense of achievement in mission work, and she would have no choice in the matter<sup>55</sup>. Nevertheless, like her mother, she accepted childbearing as a fulfilment rather than a prison. She probably never knew any woman who purposefully avoided it. To prevent children or wish to prevent them would have been dismissed by her contemporaries as irresponsible. Her great advantage was the assured attendance of a doctor who was also her husband.

He was concerned for her health now, and her condition seemed worse than it had been previously. Anticipating a difficult labour, his thoughts turned to medical articles on the subject of chloroform, the innovation hailed in Britain as having put an end to the trauma of childbirth. He thought he could make the substance, but knowing it to be unstable and thus combustible in the heat at Kolobeng, gave up the idea. The labours Mary endured were undoubtedly safer without many of the obstetrical procedures of the day.

As the birth of the third child drew near, little Agnes was nearly two, a dark-haired, brown-eyed child of happy disposition. The Bakwena, who could not pronounce "Agnes", called her "Nannee", so everyone else did too. She was joy personified—laughing aloud, her father said, even before she opened her eyes every morning. She was the apple of his eye.

The resilient Robert, dark like his sister, had survived all his illnesses to become a wiry, energetic boy. He was "perpetual motion", unable to sit down even during the family quiet hour at mid-day. He was so enamoured with wagons that his father called him a "carter", and noted that he put his potatoes like a *span* of oxen in front of his meat on the plate. His imagination took him great distances—to Kuruman and even places he had never been. When his parents told him that Scotland was very far, he declared that he would "take the pack ox and go there!"<sup>56</sup>.



He was his father's shadow, following him everywhere, imitating every activity—as craftsman, farmer, doctor, teacher. In the gardens Robert was there; in the workshop and *kgotla* he always turned up. In the following year, when he would see his father baptise his new sister, he would go out and reappear with his face dripping wet because he had “baptised” himself! While his father treated the sick Robert worked diligently beside him, butter being his universal remedy.

He was a serious, intense little boy with deep sensitivities. The responsibility of being eldest may well have hung heavy. He was expected to be brave, but his father thought something must have frightened him because, whenever a wagon and oxen came near, he panicked and bolted, inciting Nannee to run too. He had an “excitable disposition”, and was put down as “difficult”<sup>57</sup>. In particular he was obstinate. He went through a phase when he chose to speak entirely in Setswana, and when his father made it clear that he expected answers in English, Robert gave the briefest of replies. Then there was a phase when he refused to speak at all to anyone outside the family except Sechele and his father's helpers, and when the Bakwena paid him more attention than his shy, wilful nature could tolerate he fended them off with a stick!

But most often the stick was applied to him. Livingstone was not averse to giving him a thrashing when he deserved it, and once he accidentally broke the boy's finger. Corporal punishment, meted out by the parent he idolised, almost certainly made the boy worse. Intelligent but sensitive, he was destined to become a non-achiever and deeply troubled<sup>58</sup>.

The children did not lack love. They had the benefit of a father's presence, and he enjoyed their company. When they quarrelled he mediated. When they played amiably he sometimes watched their games. Once, when they were making tea, he said he wished that they had the tiny teapot they had borrowed from Grandmother Moffat. When Robert tumbled into his lap as he sat writing a letter he was amused that the stubborn boy always refused to cry, even when he was caught at mischief.

But he rarely gave them all his attention. With a mind capable of working on two planes at once, Livingstone cultivated detachment from the immediate to contemplate the abstract. In the midst of the din of family life, he wrote more descriptions of insects and tribal custom than anecdotes about his children, more explanation of his goals than family's activities. It can hardly be said that he took Mary and the children for granted, but they were background features in a life of personal struggle to achieve.

A missionary family was expected to give complete support to the man in his work. If he was called to serve God, then they could have no nobler place than beside him, or so ran the ideal of the day. What might be called the missionary family ethic held sway with every man, woman, and child in the missions. Mary Moffat was a paragon of the ideal; others often defined it by providing blameworthy contrast. The wife of Robert Hamilton, rejecting a life of sacrifice at Kuruman and returning with her children to England, was denounced for her unwillingness to support her husband in God's work. William Ashton, also of Kuruman, lost his son to disease and his wife to exhaustion and frequent childbirth, yet was only one of thousands whose families made the ultimate sacrifice.



In a few years a party of zealous missionaries would set out to found a mission to the Bakololo, taking their women and children with them. An infant would be born and die on the way, and the whole party except one adult and two children would perish. Yet the tragedy would be deemed a worthwhile sacrifice for the Christianisation of the heathen<sup>59</sup>. Martyrdom was not only accepted; it was expected.

Homesteading's demand for constant work took its toll on family life. Mary had little time to teach Robert and Agnes even numbers and letters, and although their father said he intended to teach them to read there is no evidence that he did. The care the children received did not extend much beyond their basic needs, augmented with discipline and injunctions to act rightly and rely on Jesus. His children's salvation was all-important to Livingstone, while their temporal wants and prospects he felt deserved less emphasis, and were even somewhat out of his control. If God had chosen his work, then God would care for his children and choose their work. "May he who feeds the young ravens remember them," he wrote<sup>60</sup>.

He was concerned about the drawbacks of life for a family in the wilds, but it was a concern for morals instead of health and safety. A few converts from Kuruman and the Bakwena who were amenable to his influence hardly made up a decent society for children. Missionaries in the field winced at every profane and ribald comment that their children overheard. Tswana nurse girls had to be admonished not to tell stories of killing, boasting and evil charms. It was not uncommon for a mission wife to discover, to her utter dismay, that her nurse-girl amused herself by teaching a toddler bad words or teasing him into nervous outbursts.

Mary had grown up in a household that adopted a few native ways but refused to compromise with the rest. Her mother had resisted carrying her baby on her back even when she could barely manage in any other way. Most missionaries insisted on the superiority of their way of life as inseparable from the religion they taught. Livingstone's appreciation for Tswana culture, which approached that of an anthropologist, did not extend to assimilation of Tswana ways by himself or his family. The wife of missionary William Ross, who was either more liberal or less diligent than most, became an object of his derision because she allowed her children to mix with African children, and thus "to grow up in unrestrained heathenism"<sup>61</sup>.

Parental condemnation of indigenous ways separated mission children from any local playmates they might have had. Thus Robert was a solitary boy. Any child whose mother made him wear European clothing regardless of the heat could not have felt much affinity for scantily-clad urchins, or they for him<sup>62</sup>. The Kwenas boys admired him, but annoyed him by standing about in little packs staring and giggling. When he wandered about, poking a stick into a hole, climbing a rock, or peering into a mouse hole among the reeds and roots, he played alone if his sister was not with him. They provided each other the only companions they ever had, and they were very close.

Livingstone's time and inclination to provide his children with companionship were severely limited, yet there is evidence that the family was happy and



cohesive at Kolobeng. Concerns over the future were rarely expressed, and practical pursuits were always in evidence. Mary patched and mended and cajoled her husband into wearing "a respectable jacket". He was a clergyman and a doctor, she insisted, even when his congregation and patients wore very little themselves. He was not oblivious to his appearance, but took a mildly perverse delight in nonconformity. He never wore clerical garb except when he administered the sacraments, preferring the flannel shirts and fustian trousers that served best on horseback and in the workshop and fields. He knew very well he made an odd clergyman with a moustache, but the hair on his lip kept off the sun, he said, and he had taken to wearing a midshipman's cap for the same reason<sup>63</sup>. The sun on his face made him almost as dark as an African, and he asked his brother Charles in slave-keeping America to imagine how that would go down where he was!

The family's diet was more unusual than their appearance. They ate game when Sechele honoured them with the breast of a wildebeest, a buffalo or a giraffe. Zebra, Livingstone observed, tasted a little less like horsemeat when it was a mare or a foal! They rarely had beef from their cattle because milk was more important. If someone came from the direction of Kuruman they got fruit from *Mma-Mary*, and made it last as long as they could. When rain fell there were wild melons, some of them bigger than they could eat in a sitting. For months at a time, however, they would have nothing fresh of any kind.

The diet was anything but balanced, and scarcity was the common condition. Their crops continued to fail. After Mabotsa they never succeeded with wheat and got only a little maize and sorghum; they never had enough vegetables; none of the fruit trees they planted survived. Coffee ran out, and they were obliged to grind maize as a substitute, but it tasted revolting. They were forever asking for supplies from Kuruman and doing without, waiting even to receive the essentials.

When the native crops were gone and the people had nothing to eat but roots and bulbs from the hard ground, locusts appeared like manna from heaven and the Bakwena ate them. Women went into the veld at dawn to gather sacks of insects as they lay torpid with the chill of night. Livingstone sampled them and decided that they were unfit for human consumption when boiled but as delectable as shrimp when roasted. He noted that the delicacy was so constipating that it could kill a horse if it over-indulged, but—reflecting on the diet of John the Baptist—that honey counteracted the effect very neatly!

The family had ten cows, seven of which were usually in milk at a time, but the poor thin beasts, Livingstone remarked, gave less milk than one in Scotland. The children grew thin and pale despite the sun, and malnutrition made them susceptible to all sorts of infections that came with the season and lasted until it ended. Mary's mother sent what she could to supplement their diet. Their hardship was never far from her mind. Then, by way of something that came to light through correspondence, her concern was transformed into real fear.

She had just returned from Cape Town where she had left three children, the last of her ten, in boarding school. Among them was Bess, her youngest, who had been born when she was forty-six. The last child was gone from her apron



strings, and there were none to follow. For half a lifetime she had cared for and delighted in children and, instead of relishing her freedom, suffered an aching despondency. Old age seemed to have appeared from nowhere. When she complained of ill health, Livingstone, realising even at a distance that her pains were psychosomatic, chided her good-naturedly, but she took offence. He seemed so callous. Had he so little awareness of women's needs and sorrows? Suddenly she was questioning whether he had any capacity for understanding and sympathising with her daughter. Now she was more worried than ever about the family at Kolobeng.

At the same time mutual regard between Livingstone and his father-in-law increased. He consulted Moffat on all manner of subjects, from the drying of hardwood to the method for tempering a cold chisel. He inquired as to the method for grafting a fruit tree twig onto an indigenous *morula*, and the signs of faith that could be identified in a person seeking baptism. He provided vocabulary for Moffat's translation of the Bible and hymns for his hymnbook. They compared notes on the geographical details of southern Africa. Their only major difference lay in their attitudes to the nature and potential of the Batswana: Moffat was the conservative; Livingstone the liberal. On the seminary question they agreed to disagree.

In later years, Livingstone boasted of his self-sufficiency at Kolobeng, saying:

We made our own butter, a jar serving as a churn; and our own candles by means of moulds; and soap was procured from the ashes of the plant *salsola*. There is not much hardship in being almost entirely dependent on ourselves<sup>64</sup>.

The truth was very different and far less romantic. Livingstone was as dependent on Moffat's material support as on his friendship and advice. The family and mission were extensively supplied by Kuruman. They often had to wait for long periods, but asked for a great deal and eventually got almost all of it: fresh and dried fruit, lemon juice, tea, home-baked rusks, grain; seeds and cloth, beads and books; tools, guns and medicines, craftsmen and drivers and the livestock to pay them. Requests were endless:

I may as well tell you some more of our wants: a trowel; large and small beads; a ladle & bullet mould; heifers if you can get them at any price (Boers charge 20 dollars for those two years old); she goats; a musket if you have one to spare; vine cuttings; fruit stones for seed; pictures; the large vice mentioned<sup>65</sup>.

When supplies from Kuruman did not suffice, Moffat put through Livingstone's orders for goods from England, and repacked and forwarded parcels when they arrived a year later. Of the fledgling missions supported by Kuruman, Kolobeng was the most demanding and dependent. The stoical Livingstone might have been willing to live without almost everything, but the mission as an effective entity could not. Its survival and influence were entirely dependent upon the Moffats and Kuruman.

For what Moffat provided from the soil and his workshop, he never asked any payment, and Livingstone was able to reciprocate only by sending rosewood for his joinery and the occasional kaross or pair of horns to pass on to curious folk in



Britain who supported the missions. He sent back some bulbs and seeds as items of botanical interest for Moffat, but they were of no value in real terms. He even compounded his dependency by directing Moffat to secure things by purchase from the Cape and draw on his salary for payment. He was always in debt in general and to Moffat in particular.

Livingstone's salary was not adequate by most yardsticks. He received £100 a year with an increment for each child. The money was intended as a subsistence, not remuneration for services rendered, and similar amounts provided an adequate living for other missionaries. The difference between others and himself was that he had chosen to live in a remote area where he could buy no manufactured goods at any but exorbitant prices, and if he ordered them he was charged for transportation and bore losses when parcels were rifled. He had chosen to live in isolation with people so poor that he could not even buy cheap grain or salt from them. He had built three missions in succession while others had built only one. He had travelled extensively, making eight major journeys in as many years, and he was preparing to mount another.

With his financial situation obviously untenable, Mary Moffat concluded that he must be trading. He was selling Sechele books, utensils, clothing and blankets; guns, gunpowder and lead. He was also known to be repairing guns and charging for his work. She raised the point without realising, however, that there was little profit to be made, and that Livingstone was entirely uninterested in gain. While the potential for wealth was all around him, and many an adventurer and trader found its source, he did not buy and sell firearms in any number, or ivory or feathers or anything else. His condition of being perpetually in debt should have vouched for his principles.

"I still prefer poverty & mission service", he said. "It is my choice"<sup>66</sup>. He was adding only minimally to his thinly stretched resources by selling the Bakwena provisions for their new way of life: books, soap and clothes; tools for farming and building. The principle of the "Bible and the plough" was Moffat's own. As for guns, Livingstone saw no necessary link between their possession and the taking of human life. He did not believe that Africans should be deprived of guns any more than a well-meaning Englishman should be prevented from hunting or protecting himself.

He also benefited from a good deal of charity from home. Without the subscriptions of church members in Britain he could not have supported his two invaluable Kuruman teachers. For Mebalwe's salary he received £12 a year from a woman church member in Scotland, and he was exceedingly grateful. Mebalwe was an excellent builder, the only man he had found who could carry a task to completion. Despite his distinction as the one who had saved his teacher's life Mebalwe retained a profound humility.

Paul was equally useful in teaching and worship, if not practical pursuits. Since the day, long before, when he had appeared at Kuruman dressed in skins and smeared with animal fat and red ochre, Paul had learned and maintained Moffat's ways and faith as an example to his people. Livingstone knew that both men had a greater prospect of influencing the Bakwena than he.



Summer came to Kolobeng in 1848 with a promise of rain that would not be fulfilled for as long as the mission stood. Drought had grown so extreme that Livingstone's books fell apart at the bindings and Mary's new bread hardened as it was cut. Livingstone placed some of Mary's sewing needles in the soil as an experiment and found, months later, as he expected, that they showed no sign of rust. He put a thermometer into the ground and it registered 133 degrees at mid-day. The atmosphere was so devoid of moisture that the children's lips and fingers cracked and hurt. The air gave the sensation of being too dry to breathe. He suffered headaches again, as when he was digging and building, and Mary was troubled by chest pains.

The water in the Kolobeng, that had once had enough force to break the dam, evaporated into pools with so many dead fish that hyenas "were unable to finish the putrid masses"<sup>67</sup>. As a last resort and pathetic gesture in the face of defeat, Livingstone worked with his men to dig a pit in the dry river bed to reach a little water below the surface. Across the top, he laid heavy poles to prevent children and animals from falling in, and returned to his work, inquiring from time to time how much water had collected at the bottom.

He would wait for rain, and in the meantime all his effort would go into his teaching. Sechele was the key, he believed, though the assumption would prove erroneous. The problems he would encounter in the following months would make his present difficulties pale in comparison. In the eyes of the Bakwena, the religion of the *monare* had become a threat, and a crisis was silently gaining momentum against the chiefship.



## Chapter Five

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### The Chieftdom in Crisis 1848

*I stood with old Koloï among the ruins, asking where the tribal town might have been. He pointed first to pockets of mosu trees that always show human habitation—I knew he had been a horticulturalist. But it was not his knowledge that I wanted, but memory. Long ago, as a Kwena boy in a Kwena town, he had cared for the aging and blind Baotsiwa, teller of tales, pupil of Mma-Robert. She had known the town; so might he. I waited, watching his rheumy eyes, then his thin arm rose and swept an arc from river to ridge and back, describing a town more populous than I had ever imagined.*

*I searched the soil of the hillcrest above the mission, where the earth had been turned in last year's cultivation. There I found glass, English pottery and rusted iron where the daily lives of the Bakwena and the mission family had mingled. On the broad apron beneath the promontory, however, I found only potsherds and stone hut bases embedded in circles—nothing more. No artefact of trade or the outsiders' technology; no evidence of anything but the simple life and poverty of the Bakaa who came to beg refuge with Sechele.*

In the last months of 1848 David Livingstone was eclipsed as prime mover at Kolobeng because of a situation that had developed in the chieftdom. For the people of Sechele each day had intensified their hardship, and with hardship there was discontent. The time for rain had arrived, but instead of moisture there was the slow realisation that there would be none. In these circumstances the people always planted at a distance with a view to moving if the new location got rain, but Sechele would not allow it. His teacher had built a permanent dwelling and a church and canal, structures so time-consuming that once made they stood in defiance of the reality of thirstland living and of people whose stomachs were empty. Livingstone, for his part, might have accepted responsibility for the predicament, but it was not in his nature to admit blame.

The Scotsman had modelled his mission on Kuruman, which prospered decade after decade because of constant water, while the Kolobeng River had dried up almost as quickly as mortar in the walls of his house. He was tired to death of building. His back and his finances were broken; his motivation to create, endlessly, a new beginning was crushed. He could make himself move on to extend influence, but never to make a better farm a few miles upstream or down the valley.

The Bakwena were imprisoned. They were using every ritual they could remember against the worst drought they had known and were failing because they had lost their chief rainmaker. No one doubted that Sechele was a master of the *gofetlha pula*. He could make rain, but had decided not to do it. To the Bakwena, he was eccentric beyond words. They saw him stepping progressively further





*Drawing water from a pit in the river*



from his responsibilities as their father and closer to the Europeans, their things and contrivances, their ways and their religion.

Women ringed the town dancing and chanting "*Pula*" while the sky waited for the voice of Kgosi Sechele and heard nothing but the thin wailing of females. Sechele had refused to enter the rain kraal because the *monare* might see him, and when he offered to perform the rain rites in secret his people were sceptical: surely no power could result from such compromise. The anxiety of the elders was scarcely diminished when a rainmaker was summoned from a great distance: the voice of another could never sound like that of the *kgosi*.

The diviner they brought was *kgosana* of some Babididi living under Sechele's protection. He arrived wearing the furred head-dress and feathered armlets of his calling and carrying a knobbed stick to "read the bones". He proclaimed that the rain was close at hand, "in the chief's mouth!", and that he could bring it down immediately<sup>68</sup>. He required only Sechele's permission to exhume the body of a child who had died at Tshongwane. Sechele refused, saying that he believed in God, but the people were clamorous and at last he relented. Days passed and nothing happened. People whispered that Sechele's reluctance had drained strength from the *ngaka* who had been paid to make rain.

As a last resort a black sheep was slaughtered and its entrails burned, but there was no rain. So the people turned in desperation to searching fields and houses, *malwapa* and corn bins, thatching, bedding and the cold ash of fires to find the *dibeela* that held back the rain. They looked for a sieve lying in an unlikely place, the skeleton of an animal or a patch of dried blood - the evil charm of the enemy who wanted to kill them with hunger or discredit their *kgosi*.

Indeed, their *kgosi* was discredited. The *badimo*, their ancestors and guardians, had power to protect them, but could they? Sechele was mediator between the ancestors and *Modimo*, Maker of the Rain. If Sechele failed, then something or someone was waging a campaign of interference. They remained civil to the missionary, as always, but were quietly becoming convinced that he was the perpetrator of their affliction.

At Kolobeng and everywhere for a long time Tswana peoples would blame the church. Christianity was the new element in their lives, so it was obvious to them that the religion had stopped the vital communication between chief and ancestors for the favour of *Modimo*. The missionary had built a house for God, but everyone knew that God needed no house. The building was *dibeela* for which there could be no antidote or propitiation. The bond between Sechele and Livingstone, seven years in the making and the greatest hope either had for the future, was the greatest threat in the minds of the people.

As early as Livingstone's first year in Africa Sechele had been impressed with the energetic young missionary, long before Livingstone had committed himself to the Bakwena. Sechele had sat with the young white man in the shade of a wagon and listened attentively as he was told that those who heard the word of God and did not heed it would be lost, and he was astonished.



You startle me. These words make all my bones to shake. I have no more strength in me. But my forefathers were living at the same time yours were, and how is it that they did not send them word about these terrible things sooner? They all passed away into darkness without knowing whither they were going.<sup>69</sup>

Livingstone had been equally amazed at Sechele's immediate and complete comprehension. He saw the illiterate heathen suddenly driven to consume all the knowledge of Scripture within his reach. By the beginning of this year of drought at Kolobeng he had reached a point where he wished desperately to be accepted into the church, the first among the chiefs of the interior to become a Christian, and in a burst of enthusiasm said he would name his latest child "Setefano" after the first Christian martyr<sup>70</sup>.

The obstacle of polygamy, however, stood firmly in Sechele's path. His wives, who numbered five and possibly six, were sufficient to satisfy custom without reflecting pretention. In regaining the *bogosi* he had, as all Tswana *dikgosi*, forged alliances through marriage to daughters of chiefs and subchiefs whose loyalty was essential to his chiefship. Those bonds were to be respected. He was a man of strong political instinct, whose gift for leadership was only beginning to be apparent. Any thought of breaking his word or jeopardising associations went very much against his nature.

The situation was complicated. As long ago as the missionary's first visit to his people, Sechele had foreseen the possibility of a new kind of security which might make the strength of marriage bonds pale into insignificance. The white man was increasing in numbers in Africa, and his presence demanded accommodation. It was not only prudent to become versed in his customs and religion, it could be done to great advantage. The *lekgowa's* goods and technology would improve the black man's condition, and if one could attract the goodwill of the missionaries and the British Government one might have complete protection against the *maburu* who were already threatening to destroy the Bamapela, Bakgatla and Bafokeng.

Livingstone continued to underestimate Sechele's determination and abilities. When the chief asked his counsellor to join him for prayers Livingstone replied with consternation that prayers should be offered in private, and Sechele was obliged to explain that he meant to gather his wives, children and servants for Bible study and prayers in the same way as Livingstone did in his own household! Sechele had more than initiative in organising worship; he had an ability to pray simply and beautifully at any gathering.

Sechele detained Livingstone every time he appeared in the town, asking him to listen as he read Bible passages, demanding explanations, pointing out inconsistencies. He had an ear for the lyric music of the psalms and the eloquence of the prophets. He was inspired by metaphors and cadences and began to develop a natural eloquence. Livingstone watched the evolution of an evangelist who had not yet been baptised. He would not be surprised when the Mokwena became self-appointed preacher to his people. Livingstone proceeded slowly, nevertheless, weighing the sincerity of his initiate, watching his actions, waiting for more signs of faith.



The chiefship was changing drastically because Sechele was changing. He had always kept cattle, so all his people had accumulated as much as they could, and lived on their cattle posts away from the town. He had enjoyed music and drinking, so everyone joined in. He had enjoyed the hunt and was swift and powerful, so all the men had tried to match his skill. Now they saw their *kgosi* engaged in seeming inactivity—reading and talking with the *monare*—and it was no sport they wished to take part in. His tastes and habits were alien. His unguents, ochre and kaross had been thrown away; he wore white man's clothing. He ate from English crockery what his wives cooked in their iron pots. He carried a gun, rode a horse, talked of buying a wagon, affected a European air of reserve. They saw him sitting silent and pensive, his soul seemingly gone from his body, whenever there was a book in front of him.

He had become a *lekgowa*, and was unknown to them. They looked for his old air of domination, the whip he had wielded to reform them, but he said the missionary would not allow it, and seemed not to care about their behaviour or anything except to talk a great deal, like the missionary. They remembered that they had been well-known for great herds of cattle and yields of corn, and now they were reduced to digging for what they could find. Sixty-six of their strongest men had gone south to find paid work on farms, and others had gone away to hunt far afield<sup>71</sup>. Great numbers of women and children were left, and the weakest of them would begin to die if drought continued. The *morafe* might be fragmented. As a people they would disappear and nothing would ever be heard of them again.

Clouds appeared, but released no moisture. In two years every area of the country had received rain while the hills and valleys of Kolobeng had remained dry. Rain would not even "look at them with one eye"<sup>72</sup>. They tried to reason with the missionary, telling him that they listened to his teaching and got no rain, while peoples who never prayed got plenty. He asked them to have faith, to eschew charms, and their tempers rose:

We don't like you to speak on the subject. It is our bellies make us angry. We want rain, and if you argue about the means we think you don't want it, and our throats make us angry<sup>73</sup>.

The locusts that had come to provide food now stayed to eat their crops. In their desperation the people turned to Kgositintsi, younger half-brother of Sechele, who resisted the new beliefs. He raised incantations against the locusts, and sent messengers out to secure the services of a rainmaker of good repute whom he paid with his own cattle.

Unwilling to destroy wealth by slaughtering their animals, the people relied more heavily on game. Animals that had been attracted by the river were shot and speared until there were no more. Then a few appeared from a great distance as drought spread, and a lone zebra or antelope was found digging its hooves into the dry river bed in desperation for drink. These too were killed for food, to fill stomachs and dull the memory of hunger for a day.

Before the lassitude of starvation could overcome them the people worked to survive. They formed hunting parties and trekked into the desert, where they camped to prepare an elaborate game trap called the *gopo*. Several days were





*Sechele, 1865*



taken up in digging an elongated pit and constructing a V-shaped hedge on one side of it. When a herd of game had been located, "beaters" drove the animals toward the hedge. This funnelled them into the vertex and pit, where they were killed by the fall or speared before they could struggle free. Sixty or seventy head of game would be taken in the week, skinned and cooked in the open, or cut into strips to dry and take back to the hungry at home.

Gradually what they gained from the *gopo* also dwindled, and hunters went further and further into the desert at great risk of thirst, exhaustion and death. Then they stopped. They no longer left the town except to forage. Each person seemed to gather himself inward to endure or perish. The slow, creeping infirmity of malnutrition spread among the people, producing a depressing lethargy and vulnerability to disease. Livingstone found that he was treating more and more cases of indigestion accompanied by torpor and reduced mental acuity. Those who consumed nothing but leafy material and roots had become salt deficient and dehydrated. He gave salt and encouraged his patients to find a little meat or milk, but the poorest had no cattle.

Some rejected his sympathy and were unwilling to take his advice. They saw that he lived among them but did not suffer as they did. One old man spoke out bluntly:

You, who send to Kuruman for corn and irrigate your garden, may do without rain; we can not manage in that way. If we had no rain, the cattle would have no pasture, the cows give no milk, our children become lean and die, our wives run away to other tribes who do make rain and have corn, and the whole tribe become, dispersed and lost; our fire would go out<sup>74</sup>.

Sechele knew his people might wander or revolt against him after his refusals to leave Kolobeng, make rain and turn the missionary out, but he had provided them an alternative in Kgosisidintsi, and staked his chiefship on this half-brother's shrewdness and loyalty. Sechele was a gambler and always had been.

The road to regaining his chiefship had been long and hard, and since he had travelled by it he had never stopped moving toward a greater goal. The purpose of other *dikgosi* in his circumstances might have been to secure a subsistence for their people, while Sechele seemed to take his people's survival for granted. He knew that drought would abate, while the threat of subjugation by the Transvaalers would persist. He wanted his people's freedom, and he was willing to risk his chiefship for it. His identification with the *morafe* was complete.

He steadfastly ignored his people's discontent; they must bear the pain in their stomachs. With hunger he had become personally acquainted in the long years of his nomadic living. It had not killed him; he did not fear it. With risk he was equally familiar. It was fully four years since he had decided to resist the demands of the Boers, and he was still alive and beyond their control. He also knew how to bide his time. With the missionary he had learned to wait for everything—for the coveted things which were made by machines, for understanding of how to rule by persuasion, even for baptism. He needed time to plan and manoeuvre and to wait for an opportunity.



An opportunity did appear, just as it had when Bubi was killed—or so it seemed at first. It had to do with the Kaa people who lived among the hills of Shoshong. A year before they had sent a plea for help to escape persecution at the hands of the Bangwato, who had guns and were terrorising their neighbours. Messengers brought word that Ndebele refugees had settled with the Bakaa, and Sekgoma's Bangwato had murdered every one of them because Sekgoma expected Kaa strength to increase with the refugees. Their own lives were now in jeopardy, the Bakaa believed, and they were begging the Bakwena for armed assistance to help them escape the Bangwato. As the strongest chief among the Batswana Sechele would surely help them, they implored, so that they might “come and enjoy sleep”<sup>75</sup>.

When Livingstone found Sechele's men preparing to march north with charmed spears he was less gullible than he had been when they marched against Kgakge. He told them firmly not to intervene, and Sechele could not get round him this time: his baptism was at stake. So the Bakwena faced the *monare* without their chief, and presented an argument that they thought would sway him. They must aid the Bakaa, they said, or the old and crippled, the blind and infirm would be abandoned and die in the exodus.

Livingstone surprised them. He said that they must not do evil even with the intention of doing good. The persecuted Bakaa must first make their escape unaided, and then the Bakwena could freely take them into safety. They left Livingstone in annoyance and the Bakaa, hearing of his interference, resented and distrusted him.

Sechele saw that his opportunity had not yet arrived and that he had no choice but to wait. Because of the missionary he could not wage war. Because of the missionary, however, he now had a reputation for peace and protection that had attracted Bubi's people and might attract others.

Sechele admired the Sotho chief Moshoeshoe, who had taken under his protection a vast number of chiefdoms and built his kingdom into a hegemony invincible even to the Boers by sheer numbers. Like Moshoeshoe, Sechele sought the prestige of a missionary and adopted European ways to attract followers, but their similarity ended there. Moshoeshoe encouraged his people to learn Christianity while he himself stood apart. He sent Sechele messages to remind him to beware of compromise: a king must never put himself under any authority, even God's, or his people would “laugh at him”.

Sechele ignored the advice and took the harder road, the narrow path that would prove to be every bit as difficult as Moshoeshoe warned. The religion of the European already had hold of him, and it continued to gather force in his life. His faith had increased even as he realised the folly of becoming a monogamist in a society where status rested with the polygamist. Many since have questioned Sechele's belief while overlooking proof of his sincerity. Like Moshoeshoe, he might have gained all the advantage and prestige of a missionary and a European lifestyle and even avoided dissent among his people by refraining from personal involvement with Christianity, but he had chosen baptism.

The perilous step was taken in August of 1848. He told his people that he would send away all but one of his wives so that the *monare* would baptise him.



It was a simple enough announcement, but the atmosphere in the town changed instantly. Suddenly there was no one walking the paths or tending their gardens. No one scavenged in the veld, pounded maize or chatted with a neighbour beneath the *morula* tree. No one so much as offered a simple greeting. They sat outside their huts talking in low tones about the fate of the women. Sechele's wives had been loyal; they had served him and borne him children, but they were being thrown away. What was the meaning of it? What was the value of custom that could so easily be ignored?

Night fell and no one slept. Men and women gathered around fires, and Sechele's counsellors and relatives sat in *pitso* far into the night. Gradually incredulity turned to anger. Loud protests rose and fell in the darkness. Now and then someone would leap to his feet, shaking a fist in the direction of Sechele's *kgotla* and accusing him of injustice.

The outrage and spontaneous sympathy of the Bakwena for the rejected women was rapidly being overtaken by fear for Kwena safety. One wife came of the Bangwato royal family, and her militant people would be angered by her rejection. What assurance had the Bakwena that they would not now have enemies where there had been friends? The wives had enhanced Sechele's prestige and commanded respect. Ridding himself of their encumbrance was self-emasculation with the full knowledge of his adversaries, the Bangwaketse and Amandebele, who responded to weakness with aggression.

Sechele was dismayed. Had his people not anticipated his decision? Had they seen him studying the Bible for three years without expecting him to be initiated into the new belief? The fact that he had more wives than his missionary allowed had been an issue since the beginning. He demanded that his people explain themselves or keep silent. Then he spoke out even more boldly. If they intended to kill him they must do it now! There can be little doubt that memories of his father's assassination visited him, but he gave no sign of fear or any impulse to back down. Indeed, he was a gambler, and had the courage of a gambler<sup>76</sup>.

His counsellors demanded that the divorced women be allowed to remain in the town. If they continued to live at the *kgosing* the benefit of the alliances might not be lost. But Sechele refused, anticipating perhaps Livingstone's disapproval. Instead he offered a gesture of goodwill. As the women returned to their parents they were to take with them new cloth, skins and beads and everything of his property that had passed into their use. They were to take his message that he had found no fault in them, that he merely intended to follow the will of God. The demonstration was magnanimous, impressive, and yet the anger and recriminations continued. His people would not be pacified. Curses were hurled at him with impunity. Everyone knew the *kgosi* would not strike back.

Livingstone was dismayed by the crisis to an extent that he would not have anticipated. The younger wives were his best pupils. They were intelligent and eager to learn from the Bible. They understood the importance of their husband's new belief, and were willing to adopt it themselves. They were to have formed the strong nucleus for conversion of the Kwena people as a whole.

He counselled Sechele in charity toward them, for "they had sinned in ignorance"<sup>77</sup>. Then he visited each one to express his sympathy. But he found



that he could do nothing to offset the conviction of each that the Christian Church had abandoned them. Modiagape was angry. Motshipi, a Mokwena who would be forced to live in exile, was silent and bitter<sup>78</sup>.

Mokgokong's father had been Kgari of the Bangwato, initiated into adulthood with Sechele; her half-brother was Sekgoma<sup>79</sup>. She had borne Sechele three children that she must now abandon to return to her people, though her parents were dead. She begged Livingstone to let her work for *Mma-Robert* or anyone else so that she might be allowed to stay and nurse her youngest. Nor did her despair end there. "The tears chased each other down her cheeks," Livingstone wrote, because she knew she would be going "where there is no word of God"<sup>80</sup>.

Then Livingstone, despite his faith and because of his empathy for the African people, encountered doubt. He had no way of knowing that the one to be baptised was worth all this misery or that this woman in particular was not being sacrificed when her own salvation might be within reach. The forsaken Mokgokong tried to give him back his Bible, and he would not take it.

At this crucial point Livingstone may have wished that polygamy could be treated differently in Christian doctrine. Most missionaries denounced heathen practices as a matter of principle, while he felt it was worth remembering that "Jesus came not to judge". Livingstone had not condemned polygamy. He had not railed against the *bogwera* and *bojale* initiation rites, as others did, or resisted the *gofetlha pula* because he felt it was important to listen to the rainmaker's logic. The cultures of Africa must be taken as a whole, as inviolate as they were resistant to change. Yet if he gave in to his growing conviction that one should respect belief and withdraw, he would deny his calling to witness to the teachings of Christ.

Faith had led him to the mission field; now individualism was leading him away from mission society and the missionary approach because they were too simplistic. He had discovered an exhilarating freedom in the life of the frontier, while the role of evangelist carried a stifling necessity to conform.

Within a few years he would come to believe that the christianisation of Africa faced its most serious obstacle in tribalism, but at Kolobeng he rarely discussed doctrine in his correspondence. His reticence on the subject of Sechele's rejected wives is remarkable. In the two months following Sechele's announcement of his intentions Livingstone had said little to indicate that so much turmoil had erupted that the chief had ceased to rule and was at risk of assassination.

He did remark that one old woman wished that the lion at Mabotsa had finished him off! Otherwise he only alluded to his distress. He told Moffat that he was in need of "divine protection" and that he wished Paul were present to advise him on Sechele's sincerity. Finally he told Moffat that he took heart that Sechele was bearing up under threat of insurrection without shooting any of the dissidents!

Then something happened which seemed significant, almost prophetic. Two beautifully-made baptismal chairs arrived, the gift of a congregation in Birmingham. For almost a year they had been on board ship, in dock, on wagons and at Kuruman, yet had arrived within two days of the baptism. To Livingstone they were a sign of divine guidance and encouragement in his hour of trial. On the first day of October 1848, they were placed in the meeting house. Sechele,



wearing a cloak which Livingstone had ordered from Scotland, set out to walk up the hill with *Mma-Sebele*, his remaining wife, who seemed no longer resistant to the new religion. Presumably it suited her to be the only wife left and the queen.

A crowd had gathered around the meeting house, their gravity and apprehension palpable in the still morning air. Most had come determined to find out if it was true that Sechele would drink men's brains! When the cup appeared, they saw only water but peered closer—through windows and over heads—expecting something fetid and *tala* in it! Nothing reassured them. Their *kgosi* knelt at the feet of the missionary as if he were deranged. His actions were incomprehensible, insane. He was their father but was cutting himself off from them, leaving them without protection of any kind in the world of spirits. Many were in tears, and others gasped or cried out in alarm.

Then the ritual was over. Night came on and dawn the next morning, and no one had raised his hand against the *kgosi*; no one had put poison into his food or drink. Weeks passed without bloodshed or the overthrow of the Kwenana state. Months passed and the tumult died down. A precarious stability developed in the chiefship, to which Sechele's half-brother was the key.

Kgosidintsi, a man in the traditional mould, had gradually taken on more of the duties of chief. He continued the customs that Sechele had forsaken, deflected demands placed on his brother, and provided the latitude Sechele needed to become a Christian. Together they had come to a tacit arrangement for joint rule, with Kgosidintsi the unassuming subordinate whose function was nevertheless so essential that he had saved the *bogosi* from fragmentation.

As the crisis receded it became known that the Bakaa had broken away from Sekgoma. They had abandoned their cattle as the price of their freedom, and begun a month-long march southward to Sechele, with 150 miles (240km) to cover, few possessions and little food. Then, unexpectedly, they veered east. They had heard rumours of famine among the Bakwena and even more frightening accounts of Sechele being bewitched by the missionary, and they had made up their minds to join the Bakgatla-ba-ga-Kgafela of Pilane instead.

On the border of the Transvaal, just out of reach of the Boers, Kgosidintsi intercepted them. He stopped them and held their attention for hours, reasoning with their chief, Suwe, telling him that to settle anywhere in the Transvaal would condemn them to slavery: Pilane was a mere vassal to Potgieter. Kgosidintsi may have said more: that his brother was of sound mind after all; that he was benevolent; that the missionary had brought goods, real protection; that the nation was strong, and would see the rain come. Ultimately, on that day in the veld with a thousand worn and frightened refugees, he succeeded. He brought the Bakaa to Kolobeng to add strength to his brother's *morafe*.

Sechele received the refugees, and directed the positioning of their town<sup>81</sup>. Suwe complied, no longer *kgosi* but *kgosana* under Sechele's authority. Sechele's following had increased significantly, but it would be no easy task to hold such numbers in famine. His people would share what little they had, as custom demanded, and grow weaker themselves. Greater strength in numbers was offset by greater vulnerability to hunger, and a large proportion of Kaa women had children.



With the new turn of events Livingstone decided to take a census. One thousand two hundred refugees had been added to twice that number of Bakwena. He had been provided with a larger congregation for his services, but the Bakaa resented him, and the Bakwena were less amenable than they had been. Months had passed since the baptism, but friends of the rejected wives were still angry. Church attendance was the main casualty of the affair, and it had never recovered.

Though Paul and Mebalwe did their best with the school, numbers continued to dwindle. In the wake of the first Kwena baptism and the most important ever to occur among the Batswana, there was inertia and decline in the mission. Livingstone had achieved his first conversion, and may have foreseen that it would be his last. Yet he could not have predicted that he would face another reversal. Sechele, failing to live faithfully with one wife, would overturn his teacher's solitary success.

For Sechele survival and a tentative stability were replacing chaos. He had broadened the base of his nation. If he could maintain cohesion until drought broke he might achieve a political strength to be reckoned with by the Boers or anyone else. But did he realise that the *moruti* might leave him? Did he foresee in the loss of his missionary a greater crisis than revolt at his baptism or the disintegration of authority that occurs when people are ruled by hunger?



## Chapter Six

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### The Home Threatened 1849

*When drought reigns at Kolobeng it increases in the cold months. Weeks pass without moisture until there is no further possibility of it, and the desolation of winter's trough lies on grass and thorn trees. A relentless wind blows from the east, and the sky is wan and yellowed and perfectly cloudless, giving way only in October to clouds and wind turned sultry with an uncertain promise of rain.*

William Cotton Oswell, after his adventures in South Africa, had proceeded to England, and then returned to India. Eventually he received Livingstone's letters encouraging him back to the Kalahari and he replied with enthusiasm. He would arrive at Kolobeng in late May, he said, with Mungo Murray who had accompanied him to Mabotsa in 1845.

Livingstone was delighted at the news, and much relieved. The coming cool season that was essential for travel in the thirstland would not be wasted, and partnership with the two prosperous sportsmen would mean that he need not travel alone and ill-equipped. He had found Kwenas guides who remembered the direction they had taken long ago in years of good rains, when they ventured into the thirstland and skirted its arid heart to reach the ivory fields beyond. They were eager to return along the same route with the prospect of Livingstone carrying their hoard back in his wagon.

Everything was ready, but there were four months until departure. In the meantime Livingstone would make a journey to Mokgatle of the Bafokeng to determine once and for all whether he could begin a mission there with Paul in charge. If he succeeded, he could make another hasty journey before May to settle Paul and his family, but he intended to be at Kolobeng to help Mary with the birth of the third child in a few weeks' time.

He and Paul loaded a wagon with enough timber to erect a token structure at Mokgatle's town, and then set out on what was destined to be their last journey into the Transvaal. As with so many of his endeavours in those early years, Livingstone did not realise—or refused to accept—the futility of his effort.

The missionary and native evangelist travelled for six days, stopping now and again to treat the sick on Boer farms. Livingstone never ceased to be amazed at the meanness of their existence. They lived without doctors, teachers or ministers. He pitied them, yet questioned whether pity was warranted. When he arrived in Magaliesberg, he received a summons from Commandant Andries Potgieter to appear before him at his farm. On arrival Livingstone found a tall, whip-slender man with jutting chin and piercing eyes. His peculiar *dopper* trousers, that ended well above his ankles, hardly diminished the severity of his demeanour. He was the archetypal Boer patriarch with the temper of an Old Testament prophet—or pharisee. This was the man whose servant had died under the lash, the man who had pursued Africans into a cave and set fire to it.



Like a prophet he had led his band of *voortrekkers* deep into Zulu King Dingane's country. Like a prophet he had led them to victory over thousands of Zulus at Blood River without the loss of a single Boer life. Like God's instrument he offered them deliverance from the sin and evil of the black man that they believed would defile and murder them.

On this particular morning the prophet's face was chiselled with rancour. He had seen the white reverend arrive with a *kaffir* on the wagon box dressed in "white man's clothes" and carrying a gun. When he commanded Livingstone to get his sextant and calculate the latitude of his farm, Livingstone realised that the old Afrikaner, who had guided hundreds into the interior through floods, pestilence and native ambushes, hid a silent fear that he might still be in British territory.

Potgieter launched into a tirade, accusing him of trying to establish a mission for the purpose of claiming the area for the Crown. In his eyes Mokgatle was a subversive, encouraging outsiders into his Boers' domain. He said he would attack the chief's town and drive him and his people across the Limpopo if he caused any more trouble. For the first time Livingstone seemed to comprehend the danger Paul and his family would face if they settled among the people of Mokgatle. There would be no new beginning. Whatever building he and Paul might erect would be burnt to the ground.

Livingstone did not resign himself easily. He countered by telling Potgieter that if he stood in the way of the Gospel being preached among Africans the loss of souls would be held to his account. Potgieter reacted as if struck. In his own estimation he was a God-fearing man exempt from reproach. The warning was an insult. Suddenly he became so furious that he could not speak.

At length he became calmer and took a confiding tack, telling Livingstone that he would befriend anyone who worked among the African people and use his influence to sway Boer farmers to agree to the new mission outstation. Many of them were hotheads, he said, unschooled, unthinking younger men who were bent on the politics of confrontation with the English and the Africans. If Livingstone would simply withdraw and give him time to negotiate he was confident that he could win them over for him.

At home during the weeks after the encounter Livingstone felt certain that approval from the Boer leaders was simply a matter of time. Then he got a letter from Moffat that utterly dismayed him. As soon as he had left Marico Potgieter had written to the District committee demanding that Livingstone be withdrawn. If the committee failed to comply, Potgieter promised, his people would themselves remove the offender from their territory!

Livingstone had been naive. He had known that he had a bad reputation among Afrikaners. There had been an incident in which Edwards, on trek in Transvaal, had been mistaken for Livingstone and arrested. He had recognised Boer antagonism against him and still, unreasonably, expected them to approve his plans for a mission. In the same way, he had expected his District Committee to approve his plan for a seminary regardless of their opinion of him.

Few could have predicted that this Scot, nurtured on Presbyterianism, would be at loggerheads with men of the Transvaal who swore by the authority of



Biblical Scripture. Livingstone and the "White Tribe" of Africa had many things in common. Both were adaptable and hardworking, obstinate and determinedly independent, with courage and tenacity for rough living. Livingstone's love of "itineracy" was very like the *treklust* that drove the Afrikaner into the interior.

They might have earned each other's respect, but their conflicting attitude to the African overruled affinity. While Livingstone dedicated himself to uplifting the black man—body, mind and spirit—the average Boer deemed the indigenous population less than human and by no means educable. "Teach the African?" the Afrikaner asked incredulously. "As well teach baboons!"<sup>82</sup> But when Livingstone challenged the commandant to allow any one of his farmers to compete in a reading competition against one of his Bakwena, the Boer cautiously declined.

Livingstone's liberalism was beyond their comprehension, and it made them suspicious. He seemed devious. Two years earlier he had assured them that he would send a warning if the Bakwena were preparing to attack any of their neighbours. The next thing they knew Sechele had attacked and beaten Kgakge, and it hardly seemed believable that Livingstone had possessed no prior knowledge of the affair. They discerned more evidence of treachery as the Bakwena, more than any other Batswana, built up an arsenal in defiance of their authority.

It was put about among them that Sechele had armed his people with five hundred guns and a cannon, a gross exaggeration that persisted because Livingstone never denied it. He never denied it because he knew Boer fear of guns in African hands was as useful to the Bakwena as the guns themselves: it prevented the Boers "from treating the Bakwena as they did ... many others" under their domination<sup>83</sup>. Thus a balance-of-power policy was formed that he justified to a pacifist acquaintance in a letter and maintained until the Boers threatened to block his access to eastern regions; only then did he modify his stance.

In an article to *The Cape Town Mail*, he declared that the cannon was a myth whose origins lay in the simple iron cooking pot he had contributed toward Sechele's "elephant hunt", which had proved to be a clandestine operation against Kgakge. It was a credible explanation, especially in the context of the Boers' superstitious fear and embellishment of the truth. Yet when he went on to say that he never lent, sold or gave a gun ... to Sechele" the assertion contradicted his references in correspondence to guns and ammunition sold by him to the Bakwena<sup>84</sup>. He also contradicted himself when he said that the Bakwena had barely five guns among them: he had already told Moffat that they had charmed eighty guns to assure themselves that they would fire straight and true.

One may conclude, as does Schapera, foremost editor of Livingstone's writings, that Livingstone was "not only deceptive, but knowingly deceptive" to arouse sympathy for the Kwena cause<sup>85</sup>. He recognised that valuable propaganda could be generated out of the guns issue that was—like Sechele's bluff—as useful as the guns themselves. He became a tactician in psychological warfare who provided, more than firearms and ammunition, intelligence, persuasiveness and influential contacts in the cause of Kwena survival against the Boers.



While the propagandist was evasive and untruthful, so were his antagonists. The Boers flagrantly violated their own policy of refusing firearms to Africans, to enable themselves to acquire as much ivory as they wanted and as many African children as they needed to work their farms<sup>86</sup>. Livingstone's blame in the Kwena armaments question was largely limited, by simple penury, to untruthfulness. He provided some guns to Sechele and Mebalwe, but gave or sold no more than he did of other types of supplies and equipment. The Bakwena were thrown onto their own resourcefulness to acquire modern weaponry.

To their good fortune an increasing number of Europeans ventured through Kolobeng. R Gordon Cumming had guns to sell freely or give as presents to "the natives". The itinerant Evans traded with both Bakwena and Bangwato. The Cape-born McCabe, who kept a farm at Potchefstroom, explored the ready markets of the Batswana as he prepared the first traversal of the Kalahari by a white man. Thus, while Livingstone purposefully gave the impression that he was alone on the frontier, Sechele and his men bartered ivory, skins, feathers and labour for muskets and powder from Europeans in the vicinity and steadily built up an armoury despite Livingstone's inability to keep up with their needs.

As early as 1846, Sechele had acquired a fair arsenal. In 1847, it was recorded that he was keeping a supply of 100 pounds (45kg) of gunpowder safely by his bed. As might be expected, his obsession with munitions nearly cost him his life when the roof caught fire while he was outside and he rushed in to save his *monare's* gun! The powder, by some amazing stroke of luck, did not explode!

In the first months of 1849, within a few weeks of Livingstone's return from the Transvaal, the situation at Kolobeng was tense with apprehension. Potgieter, who had threatened to remove Livingstone by force, now sent Sechele an ominous demand to appear before a committee of Boers. Sechele refused, telling Livingstone that he would "sooner die than become their slave... I told them I was no longer at Chonuane, which they said was their country"<sup>87</sup>. By now, both he and Livingstone were aware that they had provoked the enemy and stood to be routed.

The missionary and the people of Sechele, so at odds over the baptism, were now bound together by a common peril. They knew that at any time a commando of men on horseback could appear on the rise from the southeast, fire at random to destroy their property, kill them or drive them out. Sechele swore that he would lay an ambush if he had the least bit of warning. If taken by surprise he and his men would rush with guns and *assegais* to the mission house to protect the *monare* and his family. The old loyalty between the moruti and his people was rekindled, and Livingstone was impressed with their willingness to fight. He also knew that it would be the first instance of armed resistance by Batswana against whites.

Rumour of imminent attack came in waves. Livingstone burned hundreds of letters to prevent them from falling into the hands of the Boers. Then, during a lull in March, the baby was born and they named him Thomas Steele. He was a healthy, good-natured child who brought new joy to the house. All too soon, however, their exercise in preparedness resumed. Mary, scarcely out of childbed, readied herself and the children to flee with the Kwena women into the desert if



the town was attacked. Livingstone's plan was to go into the hills with the men, their guns and ammunition.

Weeks passed and the commando did not appear. The likelihood of attack receded without disappearing, and tension ebbed as it had after the baptism. Livingstone found himself thwarted. He could neither carry out his plans for the eastern peoples nor confront his tormentors. Moffat invited the family to Kuruman for a rest, but Livingstone said he wanted to press on with his effort to accomplish something substantial at Kolobeng.

Then, in the same letter, a strange inconsistency appeared. He said that he was sorry that he must leave his "Bakwains" and, moving on disjointedly, mentioned that recent showers had brought on the *makatane*—wild melons that could sustain men and animals in the desert. The implication was that he was going away and did not intend to come back. The cohesion which had appeared between himself and his people, like a cloudburst promising good rain, was dismissed as insignificant. Mary and the children could come to Kuruman by all means, he told Moffat: they had eaten no fruit or vegetables for months, and had suffered greatly from the threat of attack. He did not emphasise his determination to free himself for his own journey in the opposite direction.

It was before the family's departure that he learned that Sechele had continued marital relations with his divorced wife Mokgokong. She had remained in the town with Livingstone's permission because she was nursing a small daughter and had no parents to go to; now she was pregnant. Livingstone confronted Sechele, who readily confessed, assuming his crime to be a misdemeanour. He had, after all, only gone to the woman because he was used to her; she was like his "meat", and he had never sought out any other woman. Then he discerned the depth of Livingstone's disapproval and begged leniency, but Livingstone barred him from holy communion. Sechele was devastated, but bore no resentment and resisted self-pity. He vowed to "love Christ" no matter what befell him.

The incident struck Livingstone an equal blow, and his spirits suffered greatly. The Committee, the directors and even Moffat would look for success in his enterprise and see that his single achievement had gone wrong. He had nothing to show for three years among the Bakwena and eight years in Africa. His solace, strangely enough, was Sechele himself, who had steadfastly withstood the sneers and taunts of fellow-chiefs Moshoeshe and Mosielele when he was baptised.

When April arrived Livingstone set out to accompany Mary and the children, cattle boys and drivers on the first leg of their two-week journey to Kuruman, where they would remain while he went north. Four days south of Kolobeng he said good-bye, and prepared to turn his pack ox back towards Kolobeng. Mary, whose spirit had not been bowed like her husband's with an ecclesiastical ordeal, nevertheless broke down with the realisation that he would soon venture into little-known territory and she might never see him again. If he noticed her distress, he decided to make light of it. "My poor lady", he wrote just afterwards, "is away out crying all the road in the full belief that I shall not be seen by her again"<sup>88</sup>. Her anguish was reminiscent of the situation three years earlier when



she had cradled the critically ill Robert as they crossed the Limpopo River. Instances of emotional crisis on trek were becoming repetitive. The weariness of travel, anxiety and crisis were becoming their way of life.

Livingstone, returning alone to Kolobeng, found that rain had fallen and saved a few of the potatoes that he had given up as lost. He dug them up and they were small—like marbles in the hand—but big enough that the children might have enjoyed them. The realisation made him sad. He had sent the little ones away, and the house was silent. His work around the mission served to fill the hours but not the vacuum created by his family's absence. Despondency in his mood had begun when he was prevented from establishing a station in the east, and increased with Sechele's regression. Now he was worse than ever without the family he loved but could hardly support.

Even if he had wanted to use this time to plaster or improve the house there was not enough water to do it. No rain had fallen after the brief showers, and the land seemed utterly lifeless. There was no vitality or growth, no sense of movement except the buffeting of the relentless wind. The whole country had become affected. All the springs were gone and every river. He counted one year of drought endured at Tshongwane and then three at Kolobeng. All his fruit trees and olives were dead and every seed he had sown.

As if drought and want were not enough he had found the hearts and minds of the Bakwena as barren as the soil. Empty of food, they were empty of thought and feeling. Even the Ragged Schools in Scotland, he remembered with frustration, had fed young bodies so that their minds and hearts might also grow. He could provide these people with nothing material, and the Society did not recognise the relationship between their poverty and their inability to respond. The Society's answer to the problem was always greater perseverance; it was not his.

Yet he refused to absolve his people entirely. He had warned them more than two years ago that he would not always be with them. "If spared ten years", he had said, he would "move on to the regions beyond", and if they did not learn now the fault would be theirs alone<sup>89</sup>. Hunger had interfered, but he knew their character well enough by now to doubt if they would be an ideal flock with full stomachs.

Oswell and Murray, reinforced by their servants and drivers, arrived at last on 26 May 1849, ready to begin the expedition. Sechele had hoped to join the party in order to meet Sebetwane of the Bakololo, the great chief who had captured and sustained him among his own people in his long years of exile after the death of his father. He saw, however, that he could not leave his beleaguered people or *motse* so recently threatened by rebellion<sup>90</sup>. He prepared a gift, and sent it with Livingstone to Sebetwane.

Another resident of Kolobeng joined the party, a trader by the name of J.H. Wilson, who had been encamped for some time on the outskirts of the town selling his meagre stock of cheap goods to the Bakwena in exchange for karosses and feathers. Too ashamed to ask for the use of Livingstone's forge to repair his wagon, he had nonetheless been drawn into the life of the settlement. Moffat



knew Wilson, and had a poor opinion of him, but Livingstone—ever the nonconformist, and often paternal in friendships—developed a liking for him.

Oswell and Murray left to travel ahead to Shokwane while Livingstone and Wilson made their final preparations. Then, two days beyond Kolobeng on 2 June 1849, the assorted party assembled and set off to find the lake: two gentlemen with ample means and a taste for adventure, a luckless *smouse* with a broken-down wagon and a penniless missionary with an urge to break new ground. They trekked north with 30 Bakwena, 12 drivers and attendants, 20 horses, 80 oxen and 2 wagons<sup>91</sup>.

Oswell and Murray had brought enough provisions and equipment for a year, security against any catastrophe, whether breakdown in the desert, loss of oxen to tsetse fly or theft of their food and medicines. They had enough guns and ammunition to shoot game for everyone and to fight if they came under attack. The two had underwritten the expedition admirably, yet tacitly acknowledged Livingstone as leader. He knew the country best, spoke the language and could organise the guides. He was the one capable of taking copious notes of a meteorological, geological, botanical and zoological nature, of making expert calculations of position, landfall and water systems—in essence, of collecting the scientific data that would distinguish this expedition from any ordinary traders' foray.

The men moved from one waterhole to the next, following the "hunters and traders road" to Bangwato that Livingstone had taken long ago from Kuruman. Dense bush gave way to open scrub, and the terrain became flatter and more arid. Occasionally, they found surface water in pools, but such good fortune was rare. For three days they found no water at all. They approached Serotle on the edge of Sekgoma's country anticipating a cluster of usable waterholes, but found that these had been deliberately filled in.

Tethering their desperate animals out of the way, they began digging, using their hands and taking great care to avoid crushing the fragile linings of water-filled cavities below the surface. At a depth of 12 feet (4m), water began to percolate into the depression, but so slowly that there would not be enough for oxen and horses. There was no choice but to lead the animals back to the last waterhole, knowing that some would die on the way. In all ten days would be lost.

As they suspected, Sekgoma had tried to prevent their progress. He had acquired enough guns that he no longer needed to attract travellers, and was concerned now to prevent anyone from interfering with his monopoly on ivory coming out of the interior. Livingstone had secured a Ngwato guide named Rra-Matobi, who might have been of use in gaining rapport with Sekgoma had he not been an outcast. Livingstone was forced to fall back on Tswana custom to curry favour and sent a black ox to the capital at Shoshong with an obsequious suggestion that Sekgoma leave his wells open. Sekgoma's powerful mother, suspicious of missionaries, was unimpressed, and the ox was refused, along with the next. The only course of action left was to skirt Shoshong on the thirstland side at great risk to themselves and their animals.

They moved on into the desert, their cattle lowing painfully at the smell of water stored for the men. They struck deep, heavy sand that mired hooves and wagon





*On trek in the Kalahari Desert*



wheels. The oxen and horses struggled, consuming energy and body fluid that they could ill-afford. The trek party crept forward, covering no more than six miles (9.6km) in a day instead of twenty<sup>92</sup>. Oswell, who was greatly admired by everyone for his courage, nearly gave way in despair. The situation grew worse: they were lost. Murray rode ahead alone to find water, but failed and only just managed to find his way back. They tried to locate the spoor of some large animal—buffalo, rhinoceros, zebra or wildebeest—that they knew would stay within seven or eight miles of water, but no tracks could be found.

Then Oswell caught sight of what looked like a small animal scuttling through the bush. It was a lone *Sarwa* woman who had seen them first and was terrified. They appeared to her like huge creatures the colour of animal fat, leopard-hair blowing in the wind, sitting astride beasts of a kind she had never seen before, their sleeping-huts drifting and jostling behind their cattle as if alive! She was in full flight from the apparition when, in his desperation, Oswell mounted his horse and cut her off. She fell in a heap at his feet, cowering, cringing, offering up her meagre possessions of a leather bag with two sticks for foraging. She was begging for her life.

Livingstone spoke to her in Setswana and she grew calmer. With patience he gained her trust, and explained that they needed water. She led them to a waterhole that they would never have found—eight miles (5km) in the opposite direction. They gave her meat and beads then, and she laughed with delight. Livingstone wrote later of the encounter with a deep empathy for the woman, the native of a harsh country.

Sekgoma had sent out two men in the guise of scouts to intimidate his vassal *dikgosi* into placing further obstructions in the way of the travellers. These agents told the people that the *makgowa* were coming to kill and plunder, until one of them died of fever and his fate was interpreted by the vassal chiefs as a judgement on Sekgoma's ill-will. Thereafter, the travellers met far less resistance.

They plodded on, covering more than 300 miles (480km). Then, one day, the four who were on horseback emerged from a thicket of dry-leaved *mopane*, and saw an expanse of water stretching as far as the eye could see with lapping waves and tree-lined banks. As they caught sight of it, their goal and salvation, so did their *Sarwa* guides, drivers, leaders, horses, dogs and oxen. Every man and animal ran forward, making a great din of excitement. The noise of their clamour rose until it died in the thin air on the edge of a great saline depression, a shallow, encrusted pan that stretched away like a beach in the vibrating haze of the noonday sun. The mirage was a perfect, heat-induced replica of the lake they sought, but they had gone only half the distance they would have to travel to reach it.

Livingstone and Oswell had made a pact that they would stay together whenever there was any prospect of sighting the lake. The satisfaction of being first should be shared, they had decided. When Livingstone described the incident of the mirage, however, he said that Oswell's shout convinced him that he had lost out. It was the first indication of how important it was to him to be first. He had not yet realised how easily Oswell would defer to him. Their mutual



regard would increase and survive because Oswell would seek no recognition himself.

They “saw” the lake a number of times in the Makgadikgadi Pans during June and early July, and still they had not reached it. On 4 July, however, the landscape and their fortunes changed. They came to the Boteti River, clear, cold and refreshing to weary men and animals. A people Livingstone identified as the Bayeyi lived along its banks, and told them that the water flowed from the lake they were seeking, and that its name was Ngami.

They were, Livingstone noticed, a most admirable people—taller and stronger than the Bakwena and more curious and receptive than any group he had met. The men were muscular, and paddled their heavy dugouts effortlessly to reach distant points by connecting waterways. Yet they told him of great kingdoms of people stronger than themselves. Here was confirmation of all the old Sekwena tales from the days when Sechele and a small band of Bakwena had lived among the Bakololo of Sebetwane.

Livingstone was utterly inspired by the region’s obvious potential for evangelism. He remarked that those who might consider rapture unseemly in a missionary should remember that no achievement was wrought without enthusiasm. To Oswell, Livingstone’s fervour was less remarkable than the strength of his “unaggressive obstinacy”. He would discover shortly that Livingstone had already looked beyond Ngami and the rumoured kingdoms toward the very coast of the continent, yet when he questioned his intentions would hear him say simply, “I mean to go down”<sup>93</sup>.

There were long days for plans and preoccupation while they followed the tree-lined river as it broadened and deepened toward the lake. A hundred miles further on, however, villagers were still telling them that they were a long way from Ngami. They had used far more time and supplies than they had anticipated, and the heat was returning. Going back through the desert would be more difficult than ever.

They decided to make a dash to gain the lake by leaving the large wagon and taking Oswell’s because it was lightest. They left most of their supplies and oxen to retrieve on the homeward journey and set out at speed. Presently, they met the junction of the Boteti and the Thamalakane that flowed from the northeast along the base of a vast basin that would come to be known as the Okavango. Twelve days further southwest, on 1 August, they reached Ngami. They had come 600 miles (960km) from Kolobeng.

For Livingstone, imbued with a new vision of a highway of deep and navigable rivers, the attainment of the lake was something of an anticlimax. He stood on its bank contemplating a broad expanse of water that was shallower than he had ever expected<sup>94</sup>. Miles from the shore, people could be seen punting canoes. No boat with a deeper draft than a dugout could be used anywhere on it. Ngami could never be a highway into the interior, yet there was no necessity that it should be; rivers were everything.

Others, nevertheless, would place great emphasis on the discovery of the lake, he realised, and set to work writing details of it in letters that he intended to send off to his directors and Thomas Steele as soon as he reached Kolobeng. Oswell



and Murray, satisfied simply to have reached their goal, were in no hurry to inform others of their participation in the event. The Gold Medal of the Royal Geographical Society would fall to Livingstone. He had secured all the credit for himself.

It was well past the safest season for return, and his family would be expecting him, but Livingstone was not ready to turn back. Long before his departure from Kolobeng he had formed the intention of going beyond the lake if he was presented with the least opportunity. Local descriptions of the route to the Kololo capital at Linyanti led him to believe that it was about 200 miles (320km) further on, and he prepared to go there immediately. He wanted to travel alone but Oswell begged to go with him.

They came to the town of Chief Letsholathebe of the Batawana, who had recently sent scouts to Kolobeng to encourage Livingstone to come north for trade. While he welcomed white men he, like all *dikgosi* of the interior, tried at all costs to prevent them from reaching beyond his country. If these Europeans reached Sebetwane they might prefer to trade with his people; if they sold Sebetwane guns the Bakololo would overrun his Batawana. Like Sekgoma, Letsholathebe prevented their onward passage by denying them even the simplest assistance. They wanted to buy goats and he refused; they attempted to hire guides and he said there were none. Livingstone and Oswell tried to move past him but his boatmen would not give them passage across the river.

The resolute Livingstone spent hours on the riverbank, knee-deep in the shallows and oblivious to the awful possibility of crocodiles while he struggled to construct a raft. The wood was rotten and would not support his weight, and finally he gave up. Yet his determination proved such that, when he was prevented from making a raft, he decided to swim! Oswell, who had been observing his behaviour with amazement, called it "Scottish", and concluded then and there that he would probably never have the slightest influence on him. He tried, nevertheless, to get his friend to desist by promising him a boat from the Cape to make a fresh attempt the following year.

Livingstone did give up his determination to swim, but not for the promise of a boat. He said he was loath to appear on the opposite bank half-naked among people he had come to influence! Livingstone, with his anthropologist's sensitivity to other peoples, had developed a keen concern for the look of his "white skin" among black men. Delay in his return home was undoubtedly another factor in his decision to postpone his efforts.

Mary had arrived at Kuruman tired and drawn. The grave little Robert was pallid and underweight for his age of three and, although Agnes was as spirited and talkative as ever, everyone noted her weakened condition. Only young Tom was robust, and they called him "*Tau*" because he looked like a lion with a blond mane. Grandfather Moffat said he was "a noble fellow", and he and *Mma-Mary* welcomed them all with open arms<sup>95</sup>. After the flat, sunburnt land Kuruman was a refuge, an oasis of peach trees, figs and citrus—and enough water for each to have a bath!

*Mma-Mary* took up the task of restoring them all to health. She had always been the mainstay, the source of relief for all—white and black—at Kuruman and



all the other missions. As busy as she always was with fruit drying, mending, sewing lessons and other obligations, she would now devote herself to her daughter's family.

She must have known at the outset that she would not have a great deal of time to work her miracle. Her daughter was possessed of a stubborn independence only tempered by reliance on her husband. She could not have been surprised when Mary prepared in early August to return to Kolobeng, knowing David would not be there for many more weeks. She was going back to the empty house on the arid, windswept station to make it ready, because being nearer and prepared apparently made her feel more secure in his coming. The Moffats made no protest, but loaded her wagon with grain, tools, cloth, seeds and saplings—enough food and other supplies to sustain the family in the months ahead.

When she arrived at Kolobeng it was the end of winter. No rain had fallen since she left, and the desolation seemed even more extreme after Kuruman. A dry wind blew from the east, as it did in that season, and the sky had taken on a wan and yellowed cast. The grass ground underfoot like dry crusts. Cattle were lean and the people dispirited in a way that infected her own mood. In the house fine sand lay on everything, so there was work to do even before she could recover from the journey.

In the early mornings she found the scrub growth beyond the dooryard brittle with frost and no one stirring in the town. The Bakwena huddled in their karosses in the dawn chill, coughing and wheezing with cold-season respiratory infections. Robert and Agnes played in the harsh, crystalline air in the early hours, perspired in the dazzling heat of midday and were chilled in the evening air laden with dust that descended like a blanket to grime their faces and catch their breath. By the time she put them to bed the house had become cold and dark, and sparks flew from their night-dresses—the curious static phenomenon of the pre-rains. The only night sound was the shrill, eerie whine of a rainmaker in the distance.

Strange unnatural days and nights stretched into weeks, and the children fell ill. All the work of their caring and attentive grandmother was undone, and Mary was herself unwell. Hardly able to cope with her situation, she struggled on, and when the trek party still did not arrive she sent a message north with some of Sechele's men in the hope that the travellers might be found. In the meantime she waited, gazing more frequently northward beyond the river drift.

The Bakwena came to her in large numbers, begging. She gave a few spoonfuls of medicine and food for those who were weakest<sup>96</sup>. Inevitably, some who came to her door one day failed to appear the next. Death was taking the oldest and the youngest. It took some of her pupils, but more often their small brothers and sisters. A sombre mood of mourning lay on the town and the hill. If the men did not return at all she would be faced with a double disaster.

The Moffats could only watch with sympathy and concern from a distance, writing frequently to keep up her spirits. The optimistic, resolute *Mma-Mary* said she felt the men were not quite overdue, and pointed out to her daughter the usefulness of chores at Kolobeng to prevent brooding. She and her husband



worried greatly about the children, however, and expressed their relief in late September when they heard that their health was improving. The expedition party had still not arrived, though, and there was concern between the Moffats that their daughter's fortitude and faith might not hold out. Mary, who knew she was often compared with her mother and found wanting, nevertheless did not succumb in the ordeal; she did not break down or retreat to Kuruman, though her trials were more severe than those her mother had ever had to endure.

The men, meanwhile, were on their homeward journey and progressing as swiftly as they could, but Sekgoma had destroyed the waterholes again. Many of the oxen were dead, and the remainder had been pushed to the point of collapse. As they got past Shoshong, where they received Mary's desperate message, Livingstone decided that when they got within a few days of Kolobeng he would strike out on horseback to reach his family more quickly. Murray volunteered to continue on with the main party to look after wagons and oxen, though his own wife whom he had left in Cape Town would be worried over his delay in returning. As always, Livingstone led and others deferred. Livingstone and Oswell rode ahead, promising to send back fresh oxen when they were certain that Livingstone's family was safe and well<sup>97</sup>.

They reached Kolobeng on 9 October and found the children "in mercy being restored to health"<sup>98</sup>. Mary, who had long since reached breaking point but endured, became her old self on her husband's safe return.

It had been two months since she had arrived from Kuruman to prepare for his return. He might have foreseen the circumstances and duration of her lonely vigil and distress. He had always known that epidemics overtook the country every winter—diarrhoea, bronchitis or pneumonia—and that every year one or more of them struck a devastating blow to malnourished people, his own frail children among them.

He wrote to the long-suffering Moffats to say that Mary and the children were well despite the prevalence of disease in the area, and did not emphasise the severity of the illness they had survived. He had a number of explanations to offer for the near-disaster. He had been delayed, he told Moffat, by the tardy arrival of Oswell, which meant that they all suffered inordinate thirst by travelling late in the season; distances had been greater than anyone of them had anticipated; and the chiefs had placed formidable obstacles in their way. Everything, he reported, had contributed towards a late return.

There was another factor Mary Moffat had identified with her earlier concern over Livingstone's apparent lack of sympathy. The Moffats, however, did not dwell on Mary's perilous existence in his absence. They took pride in the courage of all the men who had gone north, they said, and looked forward to seeing Oswell and Murray at Kuruman.

It was not the last time that the preoccupations of exploration would render Livingstone insensitive to the needs of his family and others who depended upon him<sup>99</sup>. It was not the last time that Mary would leave shelter to wait for her husband to return. Livingstone's concern for the family was nevertheless sufficient to make him realise that he could no longer leave them at Kolobeng, whether the Boers threatened to attack or not. Mary saw too that the house was



no longer a refuge. She also knew that David would go back to the interior to reach the Bakololo, and she must take the children and go with him or remain with her parents at Kuruman.

It had been six months since Livingstone had seen his children. He enjoyed having them around him, and described them now in letters from the perspective of time elapsed: Thomas was a happy fellow; Agnes mixed her Setswana with English; Robert had difficulty expressing himself in any language. Yet this assessment of Robert is incomprehensible in the light of his grandmother's opinion that he was bright for his age—unless the emotional disturbance that would manifest itself in later years had already taken root. That year at Kolobeng and Kuruman, and the six months of his father's absence in particular, had laid their mark on the boy. He alone among the children had been old enough to comprehend his mother's distress; he alone had profoundly suffered from his father's absence.

Livingstone's concern over the family's separation receded. The season was good. Rain fell in abundance and the Kolobeng was flowing. He saw the hills turn green before his eyes. Greener still, he knew, was the land along the great northern rivers. He wrote to Joseph Freeman, Secretary of the Society, to stress the importance of the rivers in reaching the peoples of the interior.

As always, however, plans and planning had to be set aside in favour of immediate concerns, and this time it was the recurrence of scandal among his staff. The previous year it had been Isaac, the son of Paul. Though he was a young man of good education and with the responsibility of a family, he had seduced the daughter of a Kuruman convert, and she had died in childbirth. The shame and tragic circumstances of the scandal had preyed upon Livingstone's mind. Now, on his return, it had come to light that the younger members of Paul's family had been involved in tribal practices of "excessive impurity", and his wife had been using charms.

He concluded that they had all lapsed into superstition as soon as he was out of sight, and then appeared for holy communion as soon as he got back! The most infuriating aspect of it all was that he should be the last one to find out. Even Mebalwe had concealed the truth. How typical of these people, he railed, that a man could call himself honest while subverting the future of the mission. He would not have accepted that his lengthy and frequent absences were a contributory factor in his people's regression.

Mebalwe was contrite. "We have spoilt the teaching of Kolobeng," he lamented, but Livingstone cut him off with the others—seven in all. There was no communion observance anymore. Every Christian convert at Kolobeng had been excommunicated.



## Chapter Seven

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### Reversal and Despair 1850

*Where the path descends the hill to the river it skirts a mimosa thicket. It is a secluded corner of the mission area, and the undergrowth is cleared to reveal several mounds. This is the tiny graveyard at Kolobeng.*

*In the half-light beneath a tangle of branches the soil is grey and powdery, and leaves lie where they fall out of reach of the wind. Each mound is covered with a layer of plain field stones. Those of one grave form an ellipse, and the hands that placed them planted something within—aloes or wild flowers of the Kalahari, fragile reminders that have long since withered and died. Only the stone outline remains to provide a simple but lasting memorial to a child historians have tended to forget, who lived her brief life, scarcely longer than a winter's day, in a homestead that returned to the desert.*

Robert watched his grandfather's wagon disappear over the hill towards Kuruman and wept for his loss. Moffat had brought Joseph Freeman of the LMS for a short visit to Kolobeng at the end of 1849, and Mary's sister Ann had come with them. Time had passed all too quickly, and now the relatives and visitor were returning to Kuruman.

Freeman had walked all over the mission, enthusiastic about everything he saw, interested in Sechele, and full of advice and support for his dream of travelling to England. His only hint of disapproval related to Livingstone's stubborn refusal to accept help for the throat condition he had developed. The uvula at the back of his mouth had enlarged to the point where he could barely speak, but he refused to forego preaching, and would not rest. He dismissed every suggestion that he go to the Cape for surgery, the need for which was obvious to both Freeman and Moffat.

Freeman tactfully stepped aside on the issue, while Moffat persevered in an attempt to persuade his son-in-law to go at least as far as Kuruman, saying that he would be of great help with his translations and would get a winter's rest out of the arrangement. Even this amiable bargain Livingstone declined. His mind turned entirely on his effort to reach the northern frontier. He knew he could make only one major journey a year, and if he did not use the coming season he would be delayed until the following year. He was going to try again to get through to Sebetwane.

Livingstone had made the most of Freeman's visit to persuade him of the urgent need to push into the interior. Five thousand pounds per annum and the labour of dozens of missionaries were being squandered in the Colony, he argued, while whole chiefdoms existed that had never heard the word of God. The Society's Secretary, however, could only reiterate the old objections to any change in policy. The Society could not withdraw from existing work, he said, but



he would agree to defray some of the costs of Livingstone's proposed expedition.

This was frustrating for Livingstone, and his annoyance with the Society continued to grow. The only means he knew of giving vent to it was an anonymous article to a British journal in which he wrote scathingly of the LMS<sup>100</sup>. He was gradually coming to believe that he would have to shoulder the work of the interior alone and, in so doing, distance himself from the Society. The time would come, in fact, when he would leave it altogether.

Now that his visitors had gone he found himself once again in a state of limbo while he waited for the right season for travel. Despite Freeman's admiration for the work at Kolobeng, it was virtually at a standstill, and he knew it would continue so until the Bakwena could bring in a crop. A little late rain had fallen, and immediately women had gone to their fields, swinging hoes in unison with their work songs, their children running about or drawing with sticks in the damp, sandy soil. He knew very well, however, that showers did not make a well-watered country; drought would always recur at Kolobeng. If there was rain, it did not mean that he could feed his family. He already had ample proof that the land would grow nothing but sorghum.

He had too much time for reflection. He brooded on the idea that he might never see his parents and sisters again. Frustration over his poor prospects and nervous anxiety over reaching the north combined to create an apparent sense of martyrdom. As his calling required more and more of him he registered a feeling of exhilaration at the challenge, a sensation of divine purpose, even doom. In an earnest, almost maudlin, letter to his sister Agnes he reaffirmed his calling. "God had an only son," he wrote, "and he was a missionary & a physician ... In this service I hope to live, in it I wish to die"<sup>101</sup>.

Mary and the children had poor appetites, and he used his few remaining beads to buy melons because they did not want anything more substantial. Mary was pregnant again and, as always in the early months, she was unwell. Time hung heavy at the station, but the weeks wore on, and Livingstone began to repair the old wagon, paint both the old and the new one and fit them out with beds. He loaded supplies with gratitude to the Moffats that he could include coffee, dried fruit and a new gun. He would be taking Mary and the children.

It had become abundantly clear that the family could not remain at Kolobeng with the danger and difficulties that had persisted since the previous year. It is less clear why Kuruman had not been designated the alternative. Granted, Mary could not be expected to endure their separation with grace, and preferred his assistance to anyone else's at the birth. Yet one would have expected his caution to overrule her objections.

It may be stated with certainty, nevertheless, that he had his reasons for including her in the party and one in particular stands out. A white family on the expedition would allay the suspicions of the chiefs. Despite his ineptitude in dealing with both his colleagues and the Boers, he had an uncanny sense of the best tack to take with the African people—and it did not allow for the use of a boat to get past a recalcitrant chief! He would win trust by showing trust as he always had. A daughter of the great *Moshete* would be greatly respected in the



northern regions. With Sechele's presence his diplomatic entourage would be complete.

Near the end of May Oswell arrived from the Cape with his boat, but found the mission empty. The windows of the house were shuttered, doors closed; the chief's kraal and *kgotla* on the hill above were empty and the town lifeless. Livingstone, who appeared to have left abruptly, may have intended to put enough distance between himself and Oswell that his friend could not catch up. But why?

Oswell's biographer has suggested that Livingstone reneged on their agreement in order to reach Sebetwane alone. Oswell himself made no such assertion, nor did he express disappointment that Livingstone had gone ahead. He simply remarked in his writings that Livingstone had "rather unwisely taken his wife and children with him" and, true to his nature, set about trying to conform to his friend's errant behaviour<sup>102</sup>. He followed his trail without hope of overtaking him, hunted in solitude to pass the time and found a place on the Boteti where he could wait to meet Livingstone's party on their return. According to Livingstone, the tardiness of his companion the previous season had been reason enough to go ahead without him while there was still enough water in the desert for survival. Yet he left no explanation to Oswell as he departed—no message of any kind.

The trek party wended its way northward in May of the winter of 1849, an improbable cavalcade and odd association of races: the Livingstones, twenty Bakwena and Kuruman men, Sechele, his wife and children and Mebalwe. Sechele helped out by hunting for the pot; his attendants manned kraals at night in enthusiastic anticipation of trade further on. The chief and evangelist had bought wagons, and travelled in the same style as their missionary, but in every other way the caravan was, in Livingstone's estimation, "ragtag & bobtail".

Traders who went into the interior to buy skins, feathers and ivory to sell at a profit of 3,000 percent never went as poorly outfitted as the expedition from Kolobeng<sup>103</sup>. Griquas who "went in" to trade had impressive clothes and painted wagons calculated to impress the chiefs with their ostentation. Transvaal Boers on big-game hunts did not forego any of the essentials, and their wagons were so sturdy and well-equipped that one party could "bring out" ivory from a hundred elephants. Livingstone and his party did well to carry themselves.

Provisions and equipment would cost a small fortune if adequate, but Livingstone had spurned Oswell's contribution this time, along with his presence<sup>104</sup>. Sportsmen and traders who ate curried game on trek, and had luxuries like tinned cakes and bottled fruit, enjoyed a kind of extended picnic compared to the Livingstones, who would fare for four months on stewed meat, corn, milk and bread if they could break journey to bake it. Livingstone admitted to one indulgence, and that was coffee. He and Mary drank it to overcome their exhaustion and the taste of the filthy water.

Travelling with no more than the essentials made for swiftness, nonetheless, and Livingstone insisted that they strike camp early, except on the Sabbath when they rested. They covered a steady three miles an hour for an eight to twelve-hour day. The desert would slow their progress soon enough, he knew.



The children found their recreation in the wagon and their exercise trotting alongside their father or Mebalwe. They outspanned at mid-day during the worst of the heat, more to rest the oxen than the party, and inspanned to travel until there was just enough daylight to make camp.

When they came within range of Shoshong and found the waterholes filled in again Livingstone decided to confront Sekgoma. He was not impressed. The chief wore a kaross that was dirtier than any his poorest subject might wear, despite his reputation for waylaying travellers to relieve them of European clothes and supplies. He was a slovenly, walleyed despot with a permanent scowl, Livingstone noted, remembering the fury unleashed against him seven years earlier. The interview started badly, as Sekgoma demanded to know why Livingstone, a *ngaka*, would mock him by manoeuvring past his *motse* the previous year.

Livingstone answered with disarming candour that he had simply avoided a chief who would not welcome him! After that the wily Sekgoma was more accommodating, but Livingstone was not surprised when he said he had a pain in his stomach. So the “English” *ngaka* treated an ulcer for the *kgosi* of the Bangwato, and they found themselves developing some tolerance—even affinity—for each other. Sekgoma proved entirely capable of helping the travellers, and offered to send some guides along with them.

Before he would allow them to go, however, he gave his people permission to trade with the strangers. So the Bangwato descended in a great, noisy crowd to plead in feigned desperation for food, clothes, tobacco and the hats off their heads! The Bangwato were incurable beggars. Some helped themselves at the back of the wagon while others waylaid Livingstone and his party at the front, making as much din and confusion as possible. Only when one of them had given up trying to beg the boots, shirt, or pocket watch from Livingstone, Mebalwe or one of the others did he show any willingness to bring corn, pumpkins and melons for barter.

Later the same day, and with great relief, the party set out from Shoshong to follow the edge of the thirstland and bear northwest to the lake. As the days went by they found fewer and fewer watering places, despite their guides, and water became very scarce. Mary saved what they had for the children, but eventually that was gone and they were all in dire need. They kept moving, even at night, and Mary was thankful at least that the children slept, for she had come to the end of her ability to distract them from their thirst. They went on in that way for a night and a day and finally reached water.

Then they came upon a field of *mamena* dug at random over the veld to trap game. Because they were camouflaged with branches, the drivers found it impossible to avoid all of them. Mary was in the big wagon with the children when there was a sudden, terrifying lurch, the ground disappeared from their view and they were catapulted in an endless slow motion of creaking wood and splitting spokes, screams, clattering pans and falling boxes. Shaken but unhurt, she picked herself up from the hard ground and then the children one by one. In silence, she dusted them down and wiped their faces, then remarked simply, “Is this all?” Striking a pitfall had been the thing she had feared more than anything else!



They repaired the wagon, reloaded and rumbled on. Even Mary, in mid-pregnancy, was little the worse for wear, and they counted their blessings. For all their predicaments, their near-disasters and the austerity of their existence, they were far better off than the poor Sarwa hunters that travelled with them as guides. The coarse bread in Mary's hamper and faded, stone-worn garments in the wagon chest were bounty compared to the possessions of the poor folk of the Kalahari, whose tools for survival were a knobkerrie, a quiver of arrows, a little salt and a pouch for gathering edible seeds and insects. With pity Livingstone called them "the most degraded of all Adam's family"; yet they would "see His glory" in the coming of the Kingdom<sup>105</sup>.

For the Bakgalagadi, another Tswana group who survived in the most barren areas of the Kalahari, privation had led to a state of subjugation. They were serfs in primitive fiefdoms of absentee landlords—Sekgoma, Sentufe of the Bangwaketse, even Sechele. They killed game, but dared not fill their bellies with the meat or clothe their bodies with the skins. On penalty of death everything must be surrendered to the overlord. In their nakedness they showed the scars of lying too close to the fire at night to keep warm.

Livingstone apparently never asked Sechele to free his serfs. There is no indication that he tried to improve their lot in any way except through food and medicine. But he was not without pity. With a keen sensibility, he described a Sarwa grave they came upon in the bush: a simple mound overlaid with sticks, a fire left burning nearby, a grubbing stick and tortoise shell dish placed on the ground—all that the dead Mosarwa would need for his journey into afterlife. In another place, near a waterhole, they came upon an old man covered in sores, abandoned but too infirm to crawl down to the water to drink. They gave him food, water and a blanket, and offered to return him to his people, but he protested. They could no longer provide for him, he said. They were not hardhearted, but had taken a decision, and would flee if he tried to return.

These solitary peoples were wary of whites and Griquas. Boers stole Sarwa children, the greatest tragedy that could befall a people who loved babies above all else and had so few. Griquas, it had always seemed to Livingstone, tried to imitate the Boers but only acquired their worst characteristics. He learned with satisfaction that some Griquas who had stolen goats and abducted Kgalagadi women had become stranded, abandoned their wagons, and lost everything when the Bakgalagadi burned their property in reprisal.

All through the month of May the drivers directed the oxen in a winding fashion to avoid the sickle thorns that cut into flesh and caught like grappling hooks at wagon canvas. The treacherous wasteland displayed a stark monochrome of beauty, nevertheless. Towering sansevieria stood like candles in bladed bases. Mopane trees converged in forests of gold-brown leaves that spun and clattered in the dry wind. Camelthorns and flowering syringa interspersed with "wait-a-bit" thorns and brittle motopi trees gnarled with the struggle to survive. A dab of green that riveted the gaze would turn out to be a lone, hardy shepherd tree growing crouched against the sand because a herd boy long ago had half-severed it to help his sheep survive in drought.



They came to the Boteti, and the stunted vegetation gave way to moisture-laden palmyras that rocketed to lofty heights and then burst into leafy fans with clusters of "vegetable ivory". The heavy, billiard-smooth spheres collected on the ground, and the children picked them up to test the weight of one against the other, like treasure. Undergrowth along the river's edge became denser, and the men were forced to fell trees to clear a track. Then Livingstone heard that there was *tsetse* fly ahead, and took the oxen and wagons across to the other side of the river to avoid the risk.

They heard that there was another party ahead led by Wilson, who had travelled with Livingstone the previous year, and Sam Edwards, trader son of his former colleague at Mabotsa. Most of that party were down with fever. When he reached them Livingstone found Wilson reduced to a skeleton and deathly pale, with Edwards trying to care for him as best he could. He gave Wilson quinine, and the fever broke, but he heard later that Wilson had tried to get up the same day to help one of the others, had fainted and lain for two days before regaining consciousness. Further along he found a worse situation. A trader named Harris had just lost his travelling companion and driver to fever. So many others in that group were down with fever that they were immobilised. Livingstone gave quinine again, and some sago and the loan of a milk cow to help them regain their strength. Then he moved his people on, his prospects for the weeks ahead distinctly altered.

Malaria was the scourge of Africa. It began with chills and progressed to vomiting that brought up bile. Sometimes the victim could keep down neither water nor medicine. Fever brought on delirium that led to violent, strength-sapping activity and coma. Spared the worst symptoms, the sufferer might be so nauseated by food that he could not stand the smell of it, and would lie for days without eating. All stimuli caused irritation, even a sound or a word of kindness. The headache was intolerable, the pain in the joints and muscles so acute that sleep was impossible. If he survived, the victim lay weak and anaemic, susceptible to other diseases and the lingering depression that was the mark of the disease. Once it passed, malaria might recur within days.

No one knew the cause; what mattered in the year 1850 was that quinine had proved curative<sup>106</sup>. Livingstone experimented with dosages, and compounded it with calomel to produce a purgative that was beneficial. His "rousers" were becoming well known for having enough quinine in them to make the patient's ears ring and his vision blur—and for making the cure "almost worse than the disease"!<sup>107</sup> But although Livingstone stated that he wished to build a hospital for the study of malaria, he would never actually do so. African Fever would remain the plague of the dark continent. He had become well-practised in avoiding diversion into other areas of endeavour, even ironically, when his involvement might have contributed to the penetration of Africa.

The men of Harris' party were fortune-hunters. When they were recovered and able to move on, the near-disaster they had experienced was relegated to a mere delay in their headlong rush to find ivory. When they offered Livingstone coffee, beads and a tent, he assumed that they were grateful for their lives, yet they wanted payment—and they had killed the cow that he had lent them!



They fairly "fell down to worship" ivory, he remarked. When they had acquired 215 tusks they got into a fight with some Griquas over the 216th, and one of them, he was glad to hear, had been roundly beaten. It was the first time Livingstone had known natives of Africa to raise a hand against Europeans, and he said his countrymen "sank 10 degrees in the public estimation"<sup>108</sup>. Then he learned that the rogues intended to apply to the Royal Geographic Society to lead an exploring expedition!

Word would reach him shortly that Thomas Maclear, Astronomer Royal at the Cape, wanted someone in the interior to calculate longitudes, and he was determined that blackguards like Harris, with sham aspirations to science, should have no chance. To do it himself, he judged, he would need a spy glass (which he had), a sextant (already given him by Thomas Steele) and a good ordinary watch. Oddly enough, he did not possess the last item, but decided to write off as soon as possible to ask Steele to send one.

That letter was followed immediately by another in which he changed his mind. He had decided instead to direct Steele to purchase a commemorative timepiece with the 25 guineas awarded him by the Royal Geographical Society for his discovery of Ngami. Not only would practicalities be served but he would have the appropriate memento for an important event. Vanity reigned. His sentiments had been perfectly expressed when he had said, "Even Hottentots like to have something to shew their children"<sup>109</sup>.

Within a few days the party had outspanned on the shores of the lake. He had not been particularly interested in seeing it again, but wished Mary to have the opportunity. She sat on the beach, heavily pregnant, holding young Thomas and gazing over the still water, while Robert and Agnes played in the shallows and Robert picked up a shell to take to Grandmother Moffat.

The incongruity of their mid-Victorian dress on the margin of an untouched lake found its way into memory by a circuitous route. Livingstone had somehow acquired a painting of the lake begun by Alfred Rider, a young artist who died in Harris' party. Eight years later, with the figures of his family superimposed on it somewhat inaccurately, the scene was included in the published account of his travels.

During their sojourn at Ngami Livingstone preached to the people while the family rested, but he was restless to push on to the Bakololo. He went further on and made contact with Letsholathebe of the Batawana to ask, as he had the year before, for guides. This time he was gratified to find that the presence of Sechele and Mary had changed a chief who obstructed his way into an amiable individual who stood eyeing his gun with admiration. The gun had been expensive, the gift of an Englishman whose leg he had set, but, true to form, Livingstone handed it over without a moment's hesitation. The bargain was struck: Letsholathebe was the proud owner of a new gun, and Livingstone was mobile at last, with guides who knew the country. Mary and the family would be protected by the Batawana and provided with meat while he was away.

Mary trusted the Tawana chief, and was at home in the company and care of his people and Sechele's, but she had other reasons to be anxious. She knew that she, the children and the Bakwena might fall ill, and she would find herself in



the same desperate situation as she had faced the previous year. One can only speculate over the question of whether Livingstone recognised the possibility of another calamity. As a doctor he must have calculated the number of weeks until the child would be born: if he squandered time Mary would have to give birth without his help, or in the desert as they tried to reach home. He undoubtedly knew that malarial fever, like any fever suffered during pregnancy, can bring on premature labour. He prepared to leave for Sebetwane at once, without a day's delay.

His departure, however, never took place. By misfortune—or the contrary—his driver took sick, then a leader came down with fever, then Agnes and little Thomas. A servant girl developed a raging temperature, one of the Kuruman men and then Mebalwe. Livingstone was astounded! Fever had swept through the camp like a scythe, and he had not seen the reaper. It had devastated the other parties, but he had continued to resist the glaring probability that it would do the same to his own.

One boy was vomiting and unable to stand when Livingstone picked him up and loaded him into a wagon. The Batswana were perspiring or trembling with chills as they sat or lay on the ground in their karosses. They pleaded to be left alone in their misery in a *setlagana* safe from lions while they died or recovered, but he forced them onto their feet, broke camp, and mounted one of the wagons to drive it himself. He paused in headlong flight only long enough to gather up the ailing Wilson. He was determined to get clear of the area, and only stopped momentarily to rest the oxen and treat the sick.

At the place where the town of Maun now lies he turned the wagons east to go home. Oswell was waiting for them at the ford across the Boteti River. He recognised the calamity immediately: Robert had escaped the fever, but the little girl Agnes, whom he had befriended at Kolobeng, looked pale and haggard. The distressed Mary was holding Tom, because the boy was too weak to stand. If Oswell was horrified, he held his tongue and hid his dismay. Livingstone conceded their narrow escape, and expressed his gratitude to God that there had been no loss of life. The other parties had come to a bad end, he reported, while his had been protected. Beyond this he took his usual clinical approach in the discussion of illness. Then he turned to the subject of Letsholathebe, telling Oswell about the gun that would guarantee him passage on the next expedition.

Oswell had brought supplies from the Cape and, with his usual generosity, returned the money that Livingstone had sent for their purchase. He also had potatoes and fruit from Kuruman and a boxful of apples for the children from their grandparents, but they had rotted, causing great disappointment. Livingstone's gratitude to his friend was ambivalent, nevertheless. The reaction has been interpreted variously as Livingstone's inability to see strength in Oswell's deference and, alternatively, as the result of his anxiety over the possibility that Oswell would outstrip him in exploration. Already Oswell had introduced a polite plea to be included in the next expedition, and Livingstone did not "well know how to get rid of him" unless, he added facetiously, he might "employ him to find a way down to the sea coast!"<sup>110</sup> He was finding Oswell too reliant on companionship, a bother and a threat.



Yet Oswell's trust and loyalty actually served Livingstone very well. Oswell had ample skill and courage to strike out on his own, and might well have become the most conspicuous and enterprising among the explorers of the northern regions, but he was entirely unambitious. A man of means, with all the advantages that wealth, confidence and good education provide, he remained in awe of the penniless but gifted missionary, and enjoyed a supporting role. On the Boteti, where he took leave to continue hunting, he made it clear to Livingstone that he would not venture very far northwards, and Livingstone reaped a comfortable satisfaction in knowing that the challenge remained intact for his return.

The party had driven away abruptly from the lakeshore, but not before Sechele had dispatched a message to the Kololo capital that the travellers would return the following season. Sebetwane had already heard of Livingstone the *ngaka*, relative of Moffat, and had despatched thirteen brown cows to Letsholathebe, thirteen white ones to Sekgoma and thirteen black ones to Sechele to pave the way for his return. Livingstone was already planning another attempt, and felt assured that he would reach Linyanti.

As they recrossed the thirstland Livingstone filled his time revising events of the expedition and making notes on details of flora and fauna. Mary broached the subject of the journey she knew must follow this one, and urged him to go without her so that he could have an entire year to survey Sebetwane's country. Knowing how great would be her sacrifice, he was touched by the proposal. Pity for his family mingled with enthusiasm for the venture. Yet he was unable at the moment to do more for his wife and children than to take them home as swiftly as possible.

Surface water had disappeared along with almost all the moisture in waterholes. Their own thirst was extreme, and some of the animals would not go much further. He had lost two oxen to thirst, four to pitfalls, and two had been slaughtered for want of game animals. One more had been torn to pieces by a lion. His losses came to more than £45, and wages would drive the cost of the expenditure even higher. His anxiety over expenses was hardly allayed by Freeman's pledge to assist him, because he was already preoccupied with the problems of financing the next expedition. He thought he might have to bring ivory back on that journey, whether people called him a trader or not.

Of his two wagons, one was almost ruined and the other in need of repair and too small to be of much use when he went again. He was coming out with fewer than two spans of oxen, no spares, and the ones he still had were "on stilts". They had to be rested so frequently that everyone began to wonder when they would reach home. The caravan that lumbered toward Kolobeng, with its skeletal oxen and footsore Bakwena, was decidedly more ragtag than it had been at the outset.

Livingstone's sense of humour served him then. The old wagon—with sails torn and clapping with every gust—he described as "all on one side as if it were three sheets to the wind"<sup>11</sup>. Spokes and wheels were lashed with pieces of ox yoke to keep them from wobbling out of their iron rims, and everything was so loose that the rattle and creak of their progress grew worse with each mile. The tracks they made in the sand, he decided, resembled the slithering of a snake. It



was a laughable spectacle of worn out beasts, ramshackle conveyances, himself and an odd assortment of camp followers. Then he visualised the vagabond Livingstones in future: a family so increased in size that they spilled out of a two-storey wagon!

And while he made light of their proliferation, calling it "the great Irish manufactory", the persistent addition of children was becoming a serious concern<sup>112</sup>. He would shortly have four children born in five years of marriage, with no prospect that the trend would ease<sup>113</sup>. Mary was worn out by the journey, and the whole affair of travelling with wife and children and trying to be present for each birth he found terribly unwieldy.

They arrived home at last, in mid-winter, a week before the end of July. The Bakwena had gathered a small, late harvest, but the family had none. They had planted little and tended nothing. Absence was taking its toll. The hope they had clung to of getting a subsistence from the land, had vanished with their constant comings and goings.

He wrote to Moffat for replacement oxen, adding that he also desperately needed wheat, salt and soap. The letters that asked, implored, placed orders and gave instructions for the forwarding of supplies had become incessant. He was sending a cow in part payment this time, he told his father-in-law, and apologised that it was worth only £2.5s.0d. He had bought a replacement wagon from a traveller when the opportunity presented itself, he explained, and there had been nothing left after the purchase. Payment for supplies was becoming a mere gesture. He had begun to realise that he would never be able to offer reasonable compensation.

He no longer strove for pride of independence at the mission. It must have seemed long ago when he hoped to make Kolobeng a hub for missions radiating in all directions like the spokes of a wheel. From the very beginning its existence had depended on Kuruman, and this had never altered. They had made no real beginning, and yet there was already dilapidation; the house that had never been finished now needed repair. The dam demanded rebuilding, but he was "sick of it" and could not even make a start. What use was a dam if there was rarely any water and no hope of staying? In correspondence he rode the old hobby horse: it was hard to work year after year with native people who were distrustful. He did not admit that his work among the Bakwena had, at best, been sporadic.

He cited the tale of Coenraad de Buys, a renegade in the early days of the Colony, who had taken up life among the people and become a polygamist. De Buys had told the Batswana that missionaries came to entice them to be soldiers for the British, but the irony of the story, Livingstone observed bitterly, was that no subversive influence had been necessary. The Batswana were already suspicious of anyone who came to help them. They distrusted benevolence in any form.

They deserved sympathy, nevertheless, for their difficulties with the Boers. The Transvaalers, observing with disdain the influx of traders and travellers that came with the discovery of the lake, decided to close the road to the north. They sent a terse message demanding that Sechele bar the way to everyone who tried to pass through Kolobeng, and insisted on his immediate reply. Livingstone,



still advisor and guardian, counselled silence. Yet Sechele knew that the shield had fallen. The days of Livingstone's presence were numbered. If the Bakwena moved on, Livingstone would not go with them, nor would he ever live among his people again to lend his protection.

Sechele had allowed Kgosiidintsi to take a few people eight miles (12.8km) upstream to a place called Dimawe, where they were now planting and building huts<sup>114</sup>. The land was flat and generally exposed, but there were clusters of steep rock *kopjes* to provide some protection. Game had not quite disappeared, and it was known that the soil would grow sorghum. Rumour had it that the entire *morafe* would soon resettle there, and many were already complaining that they would hardly increase their distance from the Boers if they did. Sechele, meanwhile, would not admit to any plan or manoeuvre as long as there was a shred of hope that Livingstone might persevere at Kolobeng. He must not appear to be considering any alternative.

The children were pleased to be home. Thomas had suffered greatly, but had begun to walk again. Agnes was regaining some strength, but the cows' milk that was so precious in their diet had diminished to half a pailful morning and evening. A parcel had arrived from Scotland with cloth for clothes, two little spoons made of horn and a toy dog that barked. The children were overjoyed, and quite unconcerned at the incongruity of toys and new clothes when the flour supply was alarmingly low and there was no salt at all.

Mary had no time to recover from exhaustion. She had to clean the wind-grimed house in the midst of unpacking, and confusion reigned. Every item of clothing was filled with the dust of the trail and she had nearly run out of soap. Before their departure, she had asked for soap from her mother, who boiled it up in great batches, but none had arrived. David took up the crusade, chiding the old folks in a letter:

Does *Ma-Mary* think we don't need any soap when we get into the straw here? Maybe we use *lecutelo* or scrape ourselves with a potsherd like our betters in days of yore<sup>115</sup>.

Mary would soon be "on the stocks", he added. She was already in her tenth month, and here they were putting the soap pot on the fire!

To make things worse a traveller named Green arrived, and they were obliged to give him lodging when they had only been home for two days. Two days after his departure the child was born, and they named her Elizabeth Pyne after the wife of Livingstone's good friend from seminary days. She was "about the size of *MaMary's* little finger", her father said with affectionate exaggeration, and added that she was "a very lively young lady"<sup>116</sup>. She had fine, blue eyes and a beautiful face, and they all loved her instantly.

Mary was well a day later, but took a turn for the worse on the third and fourth days after the birth, when she was overcome with fits of violent trembling that left her extremely weak. She complained of earache and Livingstone, remembering a swelling that had affected the roof of her mouth, assumed he would soon have to extract a decayed tooth. She stayed in bed day after day, so he did not notice the other symptoms of stroke.



When the paralysis became apparent he saw that it affected the right side of her face so severely that she could not smile or blink. Her right leg was paralysed. She lay immobile with her mouth twisted to one side, scarcely able to do anything for herself and the baby. She was unable to speak properly, and cried with the pain in her temple. Livingstone did what he could to relieve her symptoms without any mention in his journal of possible cause. "Cupping" on the throbbing side of her face gave some relief, but the procedure was excruciating and the pain always returned<sup>117</sup>. His anxiety increased.

The sick season arrived, and the Bakwena were ill. The older Livingstone children came down with "violent colds", and when the coughs and runny noses should have got better they worsened into the high fever and laboured breathing of pneumonia. Their little sister, barely a month old, who had smiled and gripped their fingers, took sick. It hurt them all greatly to see her ill. Livingstone had remarked on her strength, but she could not shake off the infection.

He felt the helplessness of a physician whose medicines were too harsh for so small a patient. With leeches he could try bleeding, but he had none. He rubbed the tiny, doll-like chest with liniment, remembering that Robert had suffered the same "inflammation of the lungs" as an infant, wavered between life and death and recovered. He also realised that he was the only child he knew who had ever done so.

Elizabeth hung on to life for two weeks. Then one day she grew worse, and by evening Livingstone saw her face beginning to set in death. In desperation he administered quinine and waited and watched. Hours passed in silence, and then there was a final piercing cry, and she died. The cry, he remarked in anguish, he would remember even in eternity.

They buried her on the morning of 18 September, in a mimosa thicket out of reach of the river, in case it should ever rise again<sup>118</sup>. The Bakwena, who had lost many children of their own and buried them, witnessed now the first Christian burial in their country. The grave mound would not be obliterated to hide it from sorcerers, they were told. Instead, stones were heaped into a cairn to protect the grave contents from hyenas. The *monare* placed on it a wooden marker that declared—for their need, or his—Christian faith in defiance of desolation: "When men die, they are not annihilated; Jesus will raise and judge all"<sup>119</sup>.

In the record of the child's death Mary is anonymous, as she is in so many scenes at Kolobeng. It is impossible to know whether the letter she wrote to her mother after the child died carried anguish or acceptance, for that letter and all but the briefest reference to it have not survived. Nor can we do more than guess that she was the one who placed the ellipse of field stones around the grave and planted flowers within it. Livingstone drew on the consolation that his faith provided. The child was "safe now". She had gone "to see the King in his beauty and the glorious land"<sup>120</sup>. He remained distressed, however, and was amazed that one so small, in so short a time, had twined herself round his heart.

Yet in the midst of his grief there was persistent concern that others would stand in judgement. He examined the medical facts of the case, and tried to rationalise his position. Her death, he insisted, was the result of disease prevalent in the area, and might just as well have happened if they had all



remained at home. With this comment he both anticipated the accusation and inferred his blame. He had taken the mother and fragile unborn life out into the desert where there was little food or water or rest. However little was known of prenatal care in his era, he could not have underestimated the harm that the journey would cause. Instead of healthful exercise, Mary had spent her days on the wooden seat of a wagon; instead of fruit and vegetables she had eaten porridge; instead of the security of home she had lived as a nomad. She had given the water she needed to the children. She had been thrown out of the wagon onto the ground.

The smallness of the child at birth reflected privation; her mother's cerebral haemorrhage attested to the presence of malarial infection contracted in the regions of the lake<sup>121</sup>. It was a baby more vulnerable than most that faced contagion from her debilitated brothers and sister; a mother, afflicted with pain and paralysis, who tried to hold the child to her breast. Livingstone, in due course, would reap the criticism he expected. The death of the infant and paralysis of the mother would be held to his account, and criticism would influence his decisions on the future of his family<sup>122</sup>. Yet in the long term, when historians and society had propagated the myth of saintliness in the missionary explorer, the child and the tragedy would be forgotten.

Eight weeks after Elizabeth's death the children were recovering—as they were required to do over and over again—from the diseases and disabilities of the thirstland. Their mother's paralysis had begun to lose its grip, though the constant headache and sensation of swelling in her face persisted. Their food supplies were dangerously low. They had already used the grain that Oswell had left in the house, knowing that he would wish them to have it. They had neither wheat nor maize, and the potatoes they had kept for the children had all been eaten.

Livingstone, who was hardly ever ill, began to perspire and shake with chills. When he tried to bring on sweating to ward off a respiratory infection he had severe pain in his chest. The epidemic had not spared him, but attacked him with pleurisy. While he kept going, refusing to give in to rest, a peculiar pattern of behaviour showed how ill he was. Driven by anxiety or confusion he disregarded the poor condition of his oxen, and began loading his wagons to evacuate, then found he was too weak to continue the work and gave up. He may have realised that his family's only hope was rescue, but pride prevented any mention of it. He did not know that Mary's mother had set out from Kuruman as soon as she heard that the baby had been born and Mary and the children were ill. On the wagon track, with supplies and her usual determination to put things right, she was approaching Kolobeng unaware that the baby had died.

Livingstone went on making dogged efforts to extricate his family<sup>123</sup>. He sent Paul and Mebalwe in different directions to buy a *muid* of grain from any Boer farmer they could find, but none had brought in their harvest. Mebalwe, who had never failed in a crisis, did bring back grain, but from Mabotsa!—a solution that was almost certainly anticipated in silent obstinacy by Livingstone. The much-maligned Edwards and his wife sent three pailfuls of maize, three of wheat and three of sorghum out of gratitude that Livingstone had cured their son of





*Elizabeth's grave, Kolobeng*



fever on the road to Ngami. Livingstone knew he should feel gratitude in return, but he could not. It still rankled in him that Edwards had taken over his gardens four years earlier.

The immediate problem was solved, but his morale would not recover. The loss of the child, Mary's paralysis, their destitution and the utter hopelessness of it all had beaten him. He took no interest in anything around him. When the wind rose one night and drove hailstones through the windows, leaving sixteen broken panes to mend, he looked absently at the damage the next morning and declined to do anything about it. When Mary Moffat arrived on 15 October to pick up the pieces of the broken family he rallied sufficiently to express gratitude, but when she drew his attention to draughts coming through the broken windows he was mulish: the ventilation would do them all good! Illness and latent malaria may well have been factors in his mood. Exhaustion most certainly was.

The energetic old woman herself was overcome with an odd lethargy. She settled down with the family to rest, her effervescence quite diminished. She said little about the baby's death, but she was drawing some harsh conclusions. It was obvious how many of the family's troubles were the result of her son-in-law's determination to move into new areas, taking his wife and children with him.

They went back with her in the first week of November to complete their recovery at Kuruman. He did not say that they were withdrawing in headlong retreat, but simply that they were going out "to rusticate a little". The house with the broken windows was left behind, along with the year in which the child had died and they and the mission had almost come to ruin. Livingstone had his reverses to contemplate—and the looming threat of Mary Moffat's indignation.



## Chapter Eight

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### Abandonment 1851

*It was a bend in the great River Zouga that the children remembered best, where father and Mr Oswell felled a hundred trees to let the wagons through, and later on, in a camp beneath the camelthorns, their little brother was born. They were people who had always made homes, however impermanent, and this was the one on "the high road" from Chobe to Kolobeng.*

*They were halcyon days, tranquil with palmyras and mahoganies that leant out over the broad, silent river, with time to watch the enduring cattle browse and the blue swallows swoop low over the water. There was time for the children to play, for Robert to wander in and out of camp and Nannee to be a little dark-haired lady intently preparing a tea party on the ground.*

At Kuruman the weeks of November and December passed, and then it was January, 1851. The children ran about with an energy that seemed to emanate from the grass and shade. Their hours flew by, Robert and Tom with a little wheeled cart from Scotland and Agnes with a new doll of china face and flaxen hair.

Their father sat with old Mr Hamilton, who was drifting away on the eddies of time. He spent long hours conferring with Moffat at a desk littered with Bibles and ledgers, sealing wax and plant specimens and scribbled fragments of Setswana grammar. Companionship and distraction eased the headaches of the older man which so concerned his son-in-law.

Year after year Moffat had pushed his physical being beyond its limits. No one could have understood better than Livingstone his willingness to sacrifice health for calling. Livingstone himself still tolerated his swollen uvula, preferring not to give up the time that was required to find a surgeon. Once, when he had asked Moffat to excise the uvula, the tall, fearless man—who had turned his hand at midwifery, broken bones and infected wounds—had gone so far as to take up the scissors, and then put them down again, and Livingstone set himself to ignoring the affliction as he had his injured arm.

They discussed farming, and tried out the new iron plough that had been bought for Kolobeng, with a shared vision of turned earth in a new mission field. While the delta was rife with fever, the swiftness of the Thamalakane suggested more elevated, healthier regions further on. Then, in the midst of their high expectations and as if to quell them, Livingstone received a letter from the Society that appeared more stolid and unimaginative than ever. The directors required further details about his Kolobeng enterprise, and implied that he had been seriously remiss in not providing them. At the end of the letter, nevertheless, he found the vote of confidence that he needed to proceed with consent for his new venture.



He was full of plans. Besides the plough he wanted an "iron sofa with air pillows", a pit saw and a spirit level. Hearing that a carpenter named Hood was coming out to work among the missions, he charged Moffat with enlisting his help in building the new mission. He even suggested that Moffat offer the man £20 or £30 a year and transport 400 miles (640km) into the interior to secure his services.

Livingstone, who would commit himself wholly to exploration in less than a year, was making one last earnest attempt to settle with his family. His concern for removing his children from heathen influence was being deferred, the risks of a waterless and malarial country ignored. He was "going in", resolved to stay, and intended to take Mary and the children immediately. It would save him six months or a year, the time required to return and collect them after making a beginning.

On the subject of Livingstone's intentions for his family Moffat made no enquiries. He respected the man's resolve—and trusted greatly in the Almighty. Nine years hence he would feel moved to write, "How mysterious are the dispensations of Providence" when he heard of the appalling fate of the Linyanti expedition and knew that his daughter Mary, who had intended to join that party, had been spared<sup>124</sup>.

Moffat's fatalism in 1851 was an early indication of the reliance on divine destiny that would cloud and condition missionary attitudes for the remainder of the century and be a prime force behind the Linyanti disaster. Inspired by the achievements of Moffat and his son-in-law, Livingstone, zeal for the missionary enterprise would increase until it reached such a pitch that, as historian H Alan Cairns later put it, "caution and cowardice were synonymous"<sup>125</sup>.

Mary Moffat's attitude contrasted sharply with Robert's. Without medical knowledge she had correctly concluded that the baby's death and her daughter's paralysis had been the result of travel in "sickly regions". She sensed now the pact of silence between the two men, however, and did not broach the subject of her greatest fear—that Livingstone might take his family with him again.

She spoke to her daughter instead, and received the small assurance from Mary that, if she were pregnant, she was not likely to be taken back onto the trail. The mother looked anxiously for signs of pregnancy in the daughter whose health would not tolerate another burden.

If there were symptoms of pregnancy, Mary concealed them. Only at Kolobeng, where Mary was soon engaged in her old occupation of sorting and packing, would she write the letter that so shocked and dismayed her mother: "I must again wend my weary way to the far Interior, perhaps to be confined in the field"<sup>126</sup>. With a hint of embarrassment she was admitting to a situation that she had led her mother to believe she could avoid.

Whether she was distressed is not known, but resistance to David's plan was almost certainly not her response. She was as helpless to influence his movements as she was to control her childbearing. She had a single advantage in the face of desperate circumstances, and that was her preference for the vagabond life over domination by her mother at Kuruman. Kuruman was hardly a possibility, in any case, at this point: Livingstone had said that he would make a



house and a new mission among the Bakololo, and he intended to establish his family in it immediately.

She liked to make a home, and could not easily live in anyone else's. She had a gift for taking charge of domestic arrangements at home and on trek. With her knack for creating order out of a jumble of moveable property she provided a sense of security in scarcity, and kept herself and the children so tidy and cheerful in a wagon that the whole party felt more optimistic.

In a more general sense her presence also lent some assurance of success to the new venture to make contact with Sebetwane. She was always pleased to be the mainstay, as Livingstone called her. Arthur Tidman, the new secretary of the Society, had sent his unqualified support for the expedition only after he understood that she had given hers. The Bakololo hoped for the return of the *ngaka*, but waited equally for the daughter of Moffat.

She had always fallen short in the level of commitment that her parents felt in witnessing to the heathen, but her father had another, related dream that may have attracted her enthusiasm: peace between the peoples of Mzilikazi and Sebetwane. She could be instrumental in laying the groundwork for evangelising two renowned heathen dynasties. Yet her main mission was her husband's, and in that she was inextricably involved. When he asked, "Who will go if we don't?", they both knew that she was part of the "we". It is true, of course, that he had also said, "Fever may cut us all off", and it is hard to understand how she reconciled herself to the prospect of losing her children or leaving them orphaned<sup>127</sup>.

Her mother's response to Livingstone's scheme is precise, blunt and clearly recorded, quite unlike her own. Mary Moffat read the letter that said her pregnant daughter was readying goods and children to depart, and directed a thunderbolt at her son-in-law in response. "Oh, Livingstone, what do you mean? ..."

Was it not enough that you lost one lovely babe and scarcely saved the others, while the mother came home threatened with Paralysis? And will you again expose her & them in those sickly regions on an exploring expedition? All the world will condemn the cruelty of the thing, to say nothing of the indecorousness of it. A pregnant woman with three little children trailing about with a company of the other sex, through the wilds of Africa, among savage men and beasts!<sup>128</sup>

On the creased and dusty paper her outrage reached him long after he had inspanned and the wagons had rolled out of Kolobeng. But her indignation would have made little difference if it had reached him in time. "I can't please everyone," he shrugged, "least of all those who know not the objects I have in view"<sup>129</sup>. With this retort he misjudged and underestimated her, for Mary Moffat understood exactly what the individualistic man was striving to accomplish. She had written of the lake expedition to her son John, and radiated enthusiasm for the mission that might now be established in Ngamiland—"as we hope". She had rejoiced in that letter<sup>130</sup>.

It was not Livingstone's purposes but his methods to which she objected. She saw things from a more practical point of view than either he or her equally idealistic husband<sup>131</sup>. To risk the safety of a woman and children was simply wrong, and no hope of a new mission could justify it. If Livingstone would go



ahead and find a place for his wife and children she would make no complaint: "Not a word would I say, were it to the mountains of the moon"<sup>132</sup>. Livingstone, mulling over the stinging rebuke, made a meticulous copy of every word of it in his journal.

They made their departure on 24 April 1851, almost exactly a year after the previous one. Oswell had possessed the good sense to arrive early this time, and had—as before—brought abundant supplies from the Cape. Livingstone—as before—was unable to repay him. He had settled the account for the plough, he said, and there was nothing left. Oswell, for his part, was less concerned over compensation than other matters. He had guessed that his friend would take his wife and children again, and immediately took up the task of offsetting their hardship. He was determined that, if he could do anything to prevent it, they would not suffer the privations and dangers of the previous journey.

He had an excellent West Indian cook, George Fleming, whom he immediately put under Mary's supervision, and then rode ahead to scout for campsites and water. The party could avoid unnecessary thirst and delay if he could reach each waterhole first and open it if necessary. He travelled alone, putting aside any concern for his own safety and, at the wells of Lephepe, was nearly torn to pieces by a lion that attacked him while he was mounted. Even after that narrow escape he persevered, refusing to ride with the party.

Drought had spread into the Kalahari. Wild flowers had disappeared; blades of grass crumbled in the hand. Honey bees, in desperation for food, trailed after the wagon, sensing the sugar that was stored inside, and one day Mary and the children got badly stung. They trekked steadily on into the month of June, following their old route to the lake. They came upon Green, who had stayed at Kolobeng, and a trader named H J Moyle, whose reputation for worthlessness had preceded him. It was obvious that Moyle had come from the lake, Livingstone observed, but equally useless to ask him where he was going, because he was an inveterate liar.

Moyle's companion, Alfred Dolman, was very different. Raised in a prosperous home, he had left school to travel to South Africa. Other adventurers tried to make a fortune as quickly as possible, but Dolman's interests were in the land and its people. When Sechele tormented him for trade goods he avoided him, preferring to explore and depict the land and wildlife in drawings. Talking with Livingstone, young Dolman listened to his vision of a route to the coast, and was inspired. He decided to return immediately to the Cape to equip himself in time to join the expedition.

Whether Livingstone encouraged him is not known, but he expressed his concern for the young man by noting that he was only twenty-three, and travelling in bad company. The comment, as it turned out, was a premonition, for Dolman did not survive his journey. Within weeks he was dead, the victim of misadventure or murder on the trail not far from Kolobeng. His remains—which were no more than a skull and fragments of clothing after lions found his corpse—were buried among the wild mimosas near the grave of Elizabeth. The truth of the Dolman case was never known, even after investigation, and Moffat called the tragedy just one among the many sad stories of the trail<sup>133</sup>.



The road to Ngami and back had become a thoroughfare for adventurers and profiteers. Wilson and his companions, Sam Edwards and John Leyland, had passed through Kolobeng three weeks before the Livingstones departed, and were ahead of them, travelling at breakneck speed to be first to reach the ivory of the Bakololo. Sechele, unable to join the Kolobeng party, had supported it by refusing guides to the aggressive Wilson. Livingstone knew Wilson would not be deterred for long, though, and it was imperative that the renegade traders should not be the first influence on the impressionable Bakololo. As he reached Ntsokotsa Pan and the Boteti, where previously he had turned his Kolobeng people west and northeast along the only watered route, he conceived what he thought was a better plan. He led the party across the river and struck out due north to cut off Wilson!

They passed through a little-known region of hard, flat land where there were springs at first but then an increasingly barren landscape. The desolation was more severe than any they had seen. There were no desert people and no other life of any kind—no game animals, birds, reptiles or even bees.

Like a recurrent nightmare, thirst overtook them. A guide abandoned them for no apparent reason and they lost their way. Then the last keg of drinking water was found almost empty; a careless servant had allowed the water to leak into the sand. Mary gave the children the few remaining drops but it was not long before they were crying with thirst and could not be comforted.

Of this crisis, we know only what Livingstone reported in his journal, a document that has proved to be a more reliable record of events than impressions or reflections, even his own. Mary did not admonish him, he reported simply, but he saw that her eyes were filled with tears and a silent anguish that was almost harder to bear than if she had reproached him. In the minds of both of them, it may be certain, there was the image of their children lying dead in their arms.

The spoor of a rhino was sighted, and Livingstone freed the oxen on the chance that they might smell and locate water. Attendants were dispatched to track them, while he and Oswell, aware that their last hours might be at hand, stayed with Mary and the children. They waited in silence in a country so dead that nothing moved, under wagon canvas so thin that it gave little protection against the dazzling sun.

Then the miracle occurred. One of the men sent forth reappeared with a bottle of water—silt-laden, foul-smelling stuff full of insects and rhinoceros dung that in that moment was more precious than gold. They gave it to the children and drank great drafts of it themselves, while the filth in it, Livingstone observed with droll understatement, never gave them “any inconvenience”! They had been caught in the tractless Mababe Depression. By some stroke of luck—that he would call divine intervention—their animals had sensed a way to its margin where a river flowed out of the Thamalakane. He had pushed his people and oxen diagonally across one of the world’s deadliest wastelands to save a few days, and frightened Mary and himself very badly.

Soon they reached the Chobe River on the edge of Kololo country where they could travel without urgency. The verdant shade of the banks was like a tonic



after sickness. Then, almost as suddenly as they had escaped one disaster they were overwhelmed with tsetse flies. The stinging insects were everywhere, attacking cattle, horses and travellers. The children cried out in panic, slapping their arms, legs and faces at once. A blanket gave a little relief, but the heat beneath it intensified.

At last night fell and the viciousness of the flies subsided. They drove on, fighting exhaustion, to use every hour of darkness, then at daybreak abandoned progress to cower in the semi-protection of reeds along the riverbank. For days they struggled on in this way, and in the end twelve oxen were dead to sleeping sickness and fifteen so weak that they were left behind. With heavy losses and no estimation of the distance they had yet to cover, they were located by guides that had been sent by Sebetwane to give them assistance. Their orders were to escort the missionary's party to Linyanti, where their king would replace every animal he had lost.

They were within 30 miles (48km) of Linyanti when the undergrowth became so dense that they could go no further in wagons. Livingstone and the men outspanned in a place free of tsetse, where Mary, the children and the drivers and servants could wait while he and Oswell went on with the Kololo scouts in canoes. The river was swift and treacherous, but Livingstone noticed how strong and broad-shouldered the paddlers were, and they reached Linyanti the same day. The date was 21 June 1851.

Finally they saw the legendary Sebetwane, who was tall, erect and sinewy even in middle age. Like Sechele, he had come to his chiefship as the fastest runner and the best hunter. Unlike Sechele, he was chief of a warlike people and the greatest warrior among them. Yet he seemed ill at ease in the presence of the strangers, uncertain what the occasion demanded. Then Livingstone and Oswell extended their hands in greeting, and the chief instantly responded. All three men had achieved a long sought ambition.

For thirty years, the chief of the Bakololo had devoted his life and resources to a bloody campaign of migration and empire. Fleeing his country between the Vaal and Orange Rivers in the *difaqane*, he had advanced his people until they absorbed large sections of every group they overran within a thousand miles of migration—Bangwato, Bakwena and the peoples of the lake. Now, in the midst of the Sotho-speaking empire he had created out of diversity, there were still those who spoke Setswana. Livingstone put great store in the fact: far from the Batswana he had found people with whom he could communicate. He regarded the discovery as a blessing and encouragement, and yet another manifestation of God's will.

For his part, Sebetwane hoped to gain the friendship of the missionary and his help in achieving his life's ambition of settling his people in peace and security in the highlands above the great rivers. To deter the Amandebele he had forced his Bakololo to live in the scarcely habitable swamps along the Chobe. Once, they had marooned an Ndebele raiding party on an island in crocodile-infested waters and wiped them out. They could not survive in this way indefinitely. Fever was weakening or killing the unseasoned among them who came from malaria-free areas south of the lake. Only the guns of the foreigner, he reasoned,



could free his people to take higher ground. Absorbed with the notion of guns, he believed that the missionary's preaching would teach him their power, proper use and care! Livingstone, aware of the misapprehension, decided it was best not to dispute it.

The meeting would not be complete until the Paramount Chief had seen the daughter of Moffat. Livingstone and Oswell collected their things to accompany him and a large retinue bearing gifts of honey and pounded grain along the river to the wagon camp: everyone wanted to see the *lekgowa* woman and her children. In camp with his family and a mixed gathering of Bakwena and Bakololo, Livingstone assembled a congregation and preached that morning and again in the evening, then retired in exhaustion to sleep.

In the dead of night he was roused by Sebetwane, who appeared like an apparition before him and Oswell. They listened, rapt, as the towering figure embarked on a hesitant, rambling, then increasingly powerful and profound account of his life and exploits. In the firelight, an impassioned chronicle unfolded of battles fought, chiefdoms defeated, booty taken. The war cries of remembered battles gripped the listeners as the chief's voice rose to a crescendo. In those hours he had reached the very climax of an extraordinary life.

As dawn broke the monologue subsided, leaving the great man shaken and vulnerable. Soon it was reported that he was ill, and within days he lay dying. Historians have reported variously that Sebetwane died of pneumonia and that he succumbed to an old chest wound sustained in 1826. Others have conjectured that a kick from Livingstone's horse caused the wound to erupt; others, that there was some combination of factors in his sudden demise. Livingstone said that malaria contributed, along with large quantities of *dagga*.

Before the end came, when Livingstone might have had the power to save him, he hesitated. If he failed, he was well aware, the Bakololo might accuse him of witchcraft and murder his family. He stood by quietly, and watched and waited. As his last act the chief raised his head from the mat on which he lay, and directed his servants to take milk to young Robert, for whom he felt great affection, and then allowed himself to be lifted and carried to the canoes that would take him back to his capital. He did not survive the journey.

Livingstone meditated on his passing. Just as his hands had faltered in healing, his mouth had been stopped from preaching for fear of superstition, and remorse descended upon him now as a great weight. He had always felt deeply the tragedy of death without salvation. At the death of Sehamy, his companion on early journeys from Kuruman, he had written:

Didst thou think of what I told thee as thou turnedst from side to side in distress? I could weep for thou soul. But now nothing can be done. Thy fate is fixed. ...Help me, O Lord Jesus, to be faithful to everyone. Remember me, and let me not be guilty of the blood of souls<sup>134</sup>.

It was an extraordinary lament, and in the years between that early grief and this one he knew that he had not secured one soul for God. Millions lived in darkness from Linyanti to the coast; there was evil everywhere, and the immensity of the task before him was almost beyond comprehension.



Days later he and Oswell took their horses and rode away to survey the river called Sesheke or Borotse. They were amazed to find that it was 500 yards (450m) wide and had a floodplain of 15 miles (24km) in some places. Livingstone concluded at that point or soon after that it was the main branch of the Zambezi that flowed to the sea, and in grim confirmation found signs that slavery had crept inland from the coast with the Arabs and Portuguese.

Slavery infected the land like leprosy. Men wore sewn clothes of English cloth and carried guns, and too few of them had been acquired through the ivory trade. A boy fetched 9 yards (8m) of cloth or a musket. Livingstone was appalled, and equally astonished to realise that the cure might be exactly what he had already contemplated. If he could travel the breadth of the continent, east or west to trace the river systems, he could demonstrate a route that was more direct than the one from the Cape. Honest businessmen could then be encouraged to bring their goods to exchange for the resources of the land. Ivory that lay rotting from exposure in remote areas need no longer be called *marapo hela*—"bones only". It would be exchangeable, and the trade in human lives would be driven out.

Plans and ideas came to him thick and fast of late. It was only recently that he had yearned for a more pastoral occupation. Exhausted in breaking through to the Chobe, he had taken comfort in his plan for a church and a translation of the Bible into the Kololo dialect. Now that he felt compelled to open a route outward the plan for a settled mission began to fall away.

In any case, he argued, there was nowhere to build. He and Oswell had discovered that there was no land but malarial swamps and boggy ground for a hundred miles along the Sesheke. The only possibility he saw was in removing the Bakololo to an upland area before settling down among them. The chiefship was unstable since the death of Sebetwane, however, and his influence might have to be won again at the expense of a great deal of time.

It must have been at this time that his plans to replace Kolobeng entered the realm of good intentions never met. The mission that had seemed a reality only a few weeks earlier had now been postponed indefinitely. He was not ready to admit it, but the mission would never be built. Sebetwane's daughter and successor, *Mma-Motsiasane*, would rule wisely but briefly, and abdicate to a weaker half-brother who would stir Kololo hostility against foreigners. The empire to which their father had devoted his lifetime would in a few years be brought to ruin. There would be no migration to the highlands, no permanent settlement for the fatherless people or for the missionary and a succession of others who would seek out the kingdom for ministry.

Livingstone would in a sense, however, have his divine mission on the Zambezi. He would complete the inconceivable task of walking 2,000 miles (3,200km), reach one coast and then turn back to the remote centre of the continent to reach the other. The man who had caught the world's attention with Ngami would perform this remarkable feat only after overcoming the greatest obstacle of all—the burden of his family. They were now so troublesome to him that he felt overwhelmed with desperation. His wife was an object of pity as she



wrestled with his goals in opposition to the needs of the children; the children's welfare, even their lives, had been compromised. A solution must be found.

To the LMS he wrote that he needed two years' freedom from family responsibilities in which to seek a route westward and a mission site in the Zambezi region. Soon afterwards he told the directors that three years were necessary. In hindsight he would see that even that estimate was unrealistic: the traversal alone would take three years. From the beginning Livingstone underestimated the time he was to devote to exploration and the finality of his departure from missionary endeavour.

He also wrote that, although he could choose to risk his own life for God's work, he did not have "the same freedom" with the lives of his wife and children. A few months earlier he had reconciled himself to the awful possibility that his wife and children might die in the cause he had accepted; now he was determined that they should be spared. What had happened to the ideal of martyrdom? It was a last resort that would not be required.

Despite the strength of his conviction, however, the decision was extremely difficult. He wavered momentarily and drew back as if from an abyss, castigating parishioners in England whom he said demanded too much of their mission clergy. It was almost impossible to bring up children in this way of life, he railed, adding that only the healthiest woman could survive it. It was the same smug English parishioners, he pointed out, who were quickest to disparage the missionary who failed to meet the ideal of homesteading with a family. He imagined people hurling censure, but may simply have been conjuring up an antagonist in a conflict in which the only adversary was himself. He was an impassioned crusader, a man who had already proved a gifted explorer; yet at this moment he was a man who loved his family, and did not want to part with them.

To his superiors he wrote in despair that he was "orphanizing" his children, that they would forget him because he was led by the missionary's commandment: "Go ye into all the world & preach the gospel to every creature"<sup>135</sup>. He saw for a brief moment, like a flash of insight never to be repeated, the emotional blight that afflicts children deprived of their home and father—and may have glimpsed the destiny of his own. "A greater misfortune cannot befall a youth than to be cast into the world without a home"<sup>136</sup>.

Where should the family go? Where could they be expected to live? The decision had essentially been made, and it was not to be Africa. In communicating his thoughts, however, he appeared reticent, even secretive. Weeks later he wrote to a friend saying nothing about his deliberations<sup>137</sup>. In other instances, particularly in letters to the Society, he was more candid, but appeared to be manoeuvring. By and large, he knew it was not expedient to discuss the feasibility of Kuruman, but mentioned that it was not far enough away to protect Mary from rumour and anxiety over his safety while he was away. He avoided admitting that his pride would not allow him to capitulate to Mary Moffat, and that he wanted more liberty than he could have if his family were at Kuruman. Nor did he feel it important to mention that Mary could not live happily with her parents.



He knew that if Mary remained anywhere in southern Africa, they would live together from time to time and more children would be conceived. He could not afford the endless procession of children. He could neither take them with him nor pay for their education at the nearest available institution in the Cape. To the Reverend Tidman he wrote only that the "frequent pregnancies" must be prevented for the sake of his wife's health, and the point was well taken for, within days, her health would be in jeopardy yet again through hardship and childbearing<sup>138</sup>.

He expected the Society to support his family if he sent them "home" to England, and felt no compunction in asking their help. A man who could provide little more than a meagre, semi-nomadic lifestyle for his wife and children probably felt little embarrassment about seeking the support of a society that asked so much and gave so little. He had cast the Society in the role of guardian to the homeless, and gave the gentlemen in London no choice in the matter. He called for their immediate consent by return post, but did not intend to wait for it. A letter took six months, and the same time was needed to reach the Cape, where he would arrange their passage to England. He intended to be back in Linyanti by the next travelling season, even if Mary and the children had to arrive in London on the Society's doorstep uninvited!

He had put together a plan with Mary's knowledge, if not her active involvement. She could have made herself persevere in the trials and dangers of travel, but accepted now that he must go on alone. She knew it was infinitely preferable that the children should not be made to suffer any longer. How she accepted her new destiny, the lot almost of a widow with small children in a country she hardly knew, is not known. Either she did not write during this period or her letters have not survived. Few references occur in Livingstone's letters to reflect her comments and attitudes. She may have failed to comprehend fully the fate marked out for her, but she accepted it. She accepted the task of waiting in England until they could resume their life together there or in Africa.

They talked of how she would rent a house—they had no idea where—and put the children into school. He wrote to his parents to expect the family during summer holidays, but to understand that the children were so unused to cold and damp that they must not be subjected to Scottish winters. He added, with typical abrasiveness, that to subject them to a broad Scots accent would hardly do them any good either!

The problems of the present intruded. They faced a journey of at least six months to reach the Cape, and had already been delayed in departing from the Bakololo. They had requested leave for departure, as custom required, but *Mma-Motsiasane* had kept them on and on after her father's death until finally, in mid-August, they were told that they could go.

They followed the Thamalakane as it twisted southwards to the lake without having to resort to the terrifying wilderness that had deprived them of water. At the lake they would pick up the usual route east along the Boteti, and anticipated a relatively pleasant journey. The weeks were ticking past, however, and Livingstone realised that there was almost no chance that they could reach Kolobeng in time for the child's birth.





On the Boteti River



He anticipated the blame he would incur when Mary delivered "in the field". Whether or not there were complications his outspoken mother-in-law would appear to be right about his lack of responsibility. In frustration he scratched out a letter:

I have occasionally met with people who took it on themselves to think for me, & they had offered their thoughts with an emphatic 'I think'. But I have generally excused them on the score of being a little soft-headed in believing they could think for both me and themselves<sup>139</sup>.

His withering remarks were addressed not to Mary Moffat but Robert, his friend and father-in-law, who was caught in the middle. Moffat absorbed the blow with grace, as usual, and it may have provided the assailant some relief. In other ways the errant son-in-law benefited from making his decision: with the family soon out of harm's way, both the criticism and his vexation would diminish. He would not repeat his outburst. The old affection for Mary Moffat would return, and he would soon find the good humour to write: "I expect to be obliged to pull down my breeches as soon as we reach Kuruman and get my bottom warmed with the 'taws'"<sup>140</sup>.

Mary Moffat would receive his decision in favour of the family's welfare with perfect satisfaction, even though her daughter and the children were not to live with her. Soon she would feel that she had never really quarrelled with Livingstone at all, and her pride in his accomplishments would return to blot out all memory of their conflict.

The steadfast Oswell, ever a bystander, undoubtedly did not consult with Livingstone in his deliberations over his family, but the two men held long conversations. In due course, there arose the subject of Livingstone's other great concern—his penury—and Oswell heard his cue. He was always pleased beyond measure to give any assistance, and the only repayment he required was the knowledge that the woman whose endurance he so admired and the vulnerable little children would live somewhere in safety. During their return journey he gave thought to how he might offset Livingstone's expenses in transferring Mary and the children to England.

They camped one night where they had always stayed, on a beautiful, tree-shaded bend in the Boteti River that everyone called the Zouga. The family thought of the spot as their own and called it "Bellevue". Years later Oswell would write that he always remembered the place on the "high road" from Chobe to Kolobeng—where once they had brought down a hundred trees "the size of a blacksmith's arm" to let the wagons through. And in the wagon, among the camelthorns, the new child was born that they would nickname "Zouga".

Later, during the years in England, Oswell would remind a grown-up Agnes of the days when the two of them had made teapots and cups from the giant seedpods of the trees that grew along the river. They had laid a make-believe table with sticks for spoons and leaves for plates, and they had invited Tom and Robert. He would ask her then if she remembered teasing Robert about his explorations out of camp, and how they had warned him to be careful—lest he find himself poked up on the horn of a rhinoceros or nibbled round the edges by a crocodile!



Oh yes, she would remember—the games they played as he rode by the wagon on his horse, and the stories he told to children worn out from the trail. And in the years of her growing up, when memory faded of his wide-brimmed hat and leathern breaches, there would be his letters that never failed to bring back his kindly features and effortless concern.

On the morning of 15 September 1851, Oswell asked why the drivers were not inspanning, and Livingstone, without explanation, said he intended that they all stay for eight days! Only after persistent questioning did he admit that Mary had given birth to a son in the night. Oswell was more amazed at the evasion than at the event. Perhaps Livingstone felt some chagrin over the circumstances in which he had placed his family. But Oswell was delighted, and assured his friend that he was only too happy to stay in camp as long as necessary, and when Livingstone named the boy William Oswell, he was delighted<sup>141</sup>.

Mary seemed well, but that had also been the case in the first hours after the last birth. Livingstone's anxiety was justified, for signs of paralysis reappeared<sup>142</sup>. She was in pain all along her right side down to her toes. When he tested the muscles of that side, there was no response. In his journal that day, he was as taciturn as he had been with Oswell, making slight reference to what actually constituted a medical emergency. To Moffat, weeks later, he would write that Mary had been confined and "never had an easier nor better time of it ... & all goes right"<sup>143</sup>. In his next letter to his directors, however, he would find it expedient to refer to the problem to strengthen his case for removal of the family.

For the moment he would watch and hope for the slow improvement that he had observed before in his patient, remove her and the children from the vicinity of the river as soon as she could travel and return to Kolobeng temporarily, the first stage in his plan to reach the Cape and send them away. Suddenly, however, his problems were compounded. Thomas came down with fever, and the need to reach higher ground overcame Livingstone's determination to allow Mary to rest. Motion would do her no good, but he inspanned immediately and took them out to a place where he felt he could treat the boy with some hope of preventing a recurrence.

Away from the river, he was abruptly faced with the problem of water for the animals, but ignored the thirsty oxen, wrapped Tom in a wet sheet and forced him to drink to bring on perspiration. When the boy's temperature had come down a little, he gave him quinine. By the following day he was better, and Livingstone moved the party on to Sebetwane's Drift where there was water and grass for the oxen.

Days later Tom relapsed and Livingstone felt he must be moved again regardless of Mary and child. The boy's malaria had become recurrent, however, and could erupt many times without reinfection; the preventive tactic of removing from the low-lying areas had been useless. In less than two weeks Tom was desperately ill for a third time, and Livingstone forced the oxen back onto the trail. Tom, his mother and the baby, sleepless on their pallet in the rocking, suffocating wagon, endured thirstland heat of 104 degrees Fahrenheit.

Then, as suddenly as thunderstorms fill every hollow in the desert, their circumstances improved. Thomas was well, their anxiety disappeared and they



slowed their pace to reach home with less urgency. To Moffat, who must be kept from the worst details of the case, Livingstone wrote that the boy had recovered from "a touch of fever"<sup>144</sup>. In his journal he poured forth his immense gratitude to the Unseen Hand that had sustained them through yet another alarming situation.

He was astounded at the "tokens of divine favour" that had become apparent on this journey. Early on, when they had branched off Oswell's trail to avoid pitfalls, they had become lost, and might have found themselves in grave difficulty. Instead they had been spared an onslaught of tsetse fly that killed almost all of Oswell's oxen. They had secured guides easily in return for their gun-mending skills while Wilson had tried to buy guides with new guns and failed utterly. They had reached Linyanti before Wilson's party regardless of his headstart. As he quantified the signs of divine intervention, Livingstone seemed to veer into the realm of superstition. Thomas had been spared, he wrote, while "another Thomas" at Kuruman had died. Agnes had come down with fever like the rest, but had recovered. The list went on and on.

Mary's paralysis was the gross and inexplicable contradiction in the reckoning, but perhaps he considered it enough that she and the baby had lived. The message was clear in any case: God had sustained them. Mary's mother had prayed that the journey be prevented, and instead it had been highly favoured!

They arrived at Kolobeng in late November. As they laboured up the hill to the house, every sound was exaggerated in the torpid silence. Relief at homecoming ebbed away with the discovery that there was nobody to welcome them. Both mission and town were deserted. Not even drought had wrought such desolation; *lolwapa* walls round the huts on the rise had cracked and gone unrepaired; roof thatch had fallen in or blown away. Nothing but the rudiments of shelter were left, for in poverty everything is valuable and almost everything removable. The Bakwena and Bakaa had left for Dimawe to live out their lot in the uncertain safety of clustered rocks, or be driven into the desert.

Livingstone had heard that Sechele, on his departure, had told Paul that he was "casting the dirt off his feet"<sup>145</sup>. He was not surprised; he had seen the signs of bitterness in his friend Sechele, who seemed to have done whatever he could to thwart the missionary's withdrawal from Kolobeng. Livingstone was aware that, while he and his family had been at Kuruman, Kololo scouts had arrived at Kolobeng to take him north, but Sechele had sent them away!

Livingstone, who would not normally have wanted the upper hand in a war of words and slights, countered by saying that he was the one who had shaken the dust from *his* feet<sup>146</sup> because the Bakwena would not learn. Then, with more charity, he predicted that his teaching would still bear fruit. Sechele eventually tempered his own harsh words with some semblance of the old loyalty—or recollection of the value of alliance. He sent Livingstone an ox—a strong, perfect specimen that was all the more improbable for the years of poor grazing at Kolobeng.

Besides the bearer of the gift, someone else came along the track from Dimawe. Paul or Mebalwe—the record does not tell us—came to greet the family and renew their waning association with the missionary. In Livingstone's absence,



they had persevered with the work of the mission, coaxing pupils to school, though the much-loved *Mma-Robert* was no longer there, and gathering catechumens for Bible study even without the *moruti*. At Dimawe, they had been obliged to begin again, singlehandedly, but pupils were drifting back and numbers were growing<sup>147</sup>. Rain had fallen and there was hope of good harvests. Influence might continue, even without the missionary.

Livingstone may have felt the impulse to defend himself in the face of achievements for which he could no longer take credit. He remarked that he had always known there was no more work among the Bakwena than an African preacher or two could accomplish. He did not demean his assistants' effort, nevertheless. They had proved their renewed sense of responsibility after their misdeeds of the previous year. He would take Paul to Kuruman for rest and renewal, leaving Dimawe in the capable hands of Mebalwe. He also intended to draw funds to pay them both as soon as he could clear himself of debt. By insolvency, oversight or exasperation at their earlier behaviour he had not paid them for more than a year. That amount of time, he may have realised, was long enough to live like the poor people among whom they preached.

A year later, however, he would still be deliberating Mebalwe's needs, though the long-suffering evangelist would by then be utterly destitute after the disaster of 1852. Livingstone's vacillation is inexplicable in view of the fact that a church woman in Scotland provided Mebalwe's stipend. Explanation, but not excuse, can be found in the fact that he had long since exhausted his own resources and, despite avowed self-reliance, had become dependent on the resources and unpaid labour of others.

The Bakwena and his Kuruman men were receding from his consciousness. He and his weary party had broken journey at Kolobeng for several days, but would soon be on their way. Oswell had gone already, and with him he had sent an urgent message to Moffat to arrange replacement oxen, insisting that they be strong: the cattle he had driven north had been so puny they were worthless. If he could not buy better animals he would borrow them, and if that was impossible, he wrote emphatically, he would reach the Cape and return with his own feeble twenty-four—a span short of any reasonable number. Obstinance had always been one of his chief traits.

The first week of December passed, and it was time to lift the children into the wagon that had never been unloaded. All their clothes and food were packed, tin plates and cups in side benches and cooking pots hung along the lower edge of the wagon frame. Some of his tools and as many extra leather lines as he had were included, along with his sextant and some books. The bulk of their library must remain where it was: almanacs, Bibles, religious tracts and the missionary periodicals Mary read; poetry, surgical texts and the well-thumbed issues of *The Lancet* that he had begged from acquaintances in order to keep abreast of developments in medicine.

Furniture that they had collected with great difficulty must also stay behind, the big medicine box fitted with phials and bottles, the vice and cobbling tools, the new plough and spare wagon parts. Where had it all come from? He had felt the



millstone of moveable property and had never got used to its weight. He locked the house, and walked away uphill to the *uitspan*.

It was a departure, but the finality had lost its edge. They had taken their leave eight months earlier when they had gone in the opposite direction to establish permanence in an unknown region. Before that there had been innumerable comings and goings. In the four years since he had built the Kolobeng homestead, he had spent no more than half his time in residence. The journeys had taken him away, and now they would take them all away for good. Only years later would he cast a backward glance.

Nor did the children look back. They were caught up in an adventure more promising than any on the veld. If there was sadness it was Mary's. She must have been counting all the investments since the time when she had asked her mother to send her desk and other cherished pieces and all the finishing touches envisaged for the house. She had been determined to make their home comfortable and an object of pride whenever travellers stayed.

That had been their ambition before drought worsened and it became clear that the house would never be finished. Plans and hopes had blown away like chaff on the wind, and living had turned to bare existence. If she were not departing to take the children to England, she would be setting up house all over again among the Bakololo; they could never have remained at Kolobeng. The challenge now was to wait patiently for the day when they could all be together again.

Three months later they were crossing the Cape Flats to the town that crowded along the bay and jostled up the slopes of Table Mountain. A salt wind blew chill against the ragged band of travellers, but gave way by afternoon to brilliant sunshine glinting through cloud. The oxen plodded on, and they were soon enveloped in the helter-skelter of the streets: groomed horses and carriage bells, noisy markets and imposing customs houses.

Neither the children, Kwena nurse girls or cattle boys had ever been in such a place! To them a town was the configuration of huts at Kolobeng or the filthy, fly-ridden mass of dwellings at Shoshong. The "street" that separated two houses from an orchard at Kuruman never crowded them as these streets did today. The makeshift, one-roomed shops at Griqua Town had not prepared them for the bow-windowed elegance of Cape Town. The effort to make sense of it all was dizzying, like falling off the tailboard with a bump!

The older children got free of the wagons, but wherever they went they encountered stairs—in the buildings, on the bluffs, between one house and the next. They could get up, and then it was quite another matter to get down. Even their father said he had lost the knack of stairs, and turned round to go down as if on a ladder. So they got back onto the wagon to watch the panorama of street life before them. There were Malays and coloureds, Hottentots and gentlemen in leather gloves and fine boots, people on foot and in all manner of conveyance. But there were no wagons with sails so torn and patched as their father's, no ladies with dresses so worn and mended as their mother's.

They were an anachronism. They had come out of the wilderness and an earlier era to discover that the world had passed them by. They were a curiosity.





Cape Town, 1852



Their father got their hair cut, and it was so short that they all caught cold, and still they were a curiosity. Heads turned because they could not transform their old-fashioned, handed-down garments for the up-to-date styles and smooth fabrics of the Colony.

Oswell's intervention ended their predicament. He had foreseen their debut in society. He had known that his distinguished friend would be introduced, entertained and petitioned for speeches and sermons because he was the man who had reached Ngami and the unknown north. The family would have callers and invitations, and Oswell—who had been scout, companion, support and salvation—wanted nothing more than the privilege of being useful.

He had ordered them all new outfits, they discovered, and paid for them before they arrived. Now they understood why he had gone ahead of them from Kolobeng, and realised with shame what they should have known before. Oswell had always gone ahead of them in the desert to assist their arrival.

Even the money that had been needed to hire oxen had been his, and without it, Livingstone admitted, they would never have been able to "come out". Determination alone could not have driven his worn-out animals. Discreetly, Oswell had placed funds at his disposal, and the family's purchases quickly amounted to £170. Then he pressed his friend to buy a boat for the Chobe, but Livingstone gratefully declined. Finally he boarded ship to sail for England, urging Livingstone to draw on the account he had prepared whenever he required it, adding jauntily that if there was any need of compensation, he had already taken it with ivory from "Livingstone's Estate".

It would be three weeks before the only ship on which Livingstone could get a passage for his family. He was impatient to return upcountry, though he knew he would miss them all sorely. Beyond his need to enjoy the company of his children and Mary for every minute still left to him, he existed in a kind of suspended agony. He needed to be away.

He had found someone to treat his throat, but it got no better. It hurt him even to talk, and sermons were almost impossible. He wished only to be alone in the open veld. It is quite possible, however, that his urge to escape was a result of something other than a very sore throat. He struggled for words, and lacked fluency in front of crowds in a way that had nothing to do with a swollen uvula. He said English had nearly slipped from his grasp, but in fact he had never been a good speaker.

In theological college he had made himself conspicuous for his inability to preach. In Africa he had found a niche where he could communicate effectively with another people in another tongue, and his unease in the divinity school lecture hall had receded into oblivion. His breathlessness, chest pains and struggle for words in front of audiences in Cape Town suggest that he was mindful of the realm of his greatest competence and wished only to return to it. He was determined to depart the very moment Mary and the children were gone. He had never felt so imprisoned.

The town was filled with missionaries. They were everywhere, representing every society he had ever heard of. They glided along the streets with their families, wearing good clothes bought on reasonable salaries that never bore



the expense of subsistence in the interior. One of them had caught sight of Livingstone's new outfit and remarked with impudence, "Interior missionaries are rich!"<sup>148</sup>

For the most part, of course, they were agreeable men—well-mannered, sociable, hospitable to the extent that they might have offered the family a place to stay—but they hesitated. He was only too pleased to fend for himself. When they had arrived he and Oswell had hired horses and ridden along the bluffs until they had found lodgings for the family between Table Mountain and Lion's Head, and these proved more than adequate, with a garden for the children, for only £2.10s a month.

He wrote to his directors that he would not ask them to take his family if he could afford to look after them himself. Then, in the days and weeks of waiting for the ship and the letter he needed to assure him of the Society's support, his courage almost failed him. He knew he was negotiating with men more used to petitioning for funds than distributing them, and it crossed his mind that they might be as niggardly with his loved ones as they had been with him.

Out of his desperation he wrote to Moffat, "If they crimp my wife and family in England they will hear thunder"<sup>149</sup>. He said nothing of what he must already have realised: the delay and uncertainty of Mary's letters from England to the Cape, to say nothing of the trackless regions beyond, would prevent him from knowing if his family had become destitute in time to do anything about it.



## Chapter Nine

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### Destruction 1852

*It appeared that the floor of the house had gone, that it had eroded away in the rain of a hundred seasons—sudden, wind driven torrents that explode without warning on the naked land. Yet it was intact half a metre down, the earthen surface upon which the family had lived.*

*The soil, hard-packed by cattle hooves, yielded a few objects to excavation. A rusted buckle from a pair of braces. Nails that had built the house and the one before it and might have built another. Fragments of walls white-limed but never plastered. Shards of window glass green and opaque with age. Hardened mud with the imprint of reeds from a ceiling.*

*Then there appeared in the excavation a layer of ash, reminding one that the man had ordered his house to be burned. And, at last, there in the rubble lay silent testimony of wilful destruction. The remains of a sturdy wall, battered down by the furious men who appeared on horseback to ransack the house, leaving the missionary's people with the painful task of setting fire to what remained.*

Mary and the children sailed on 23 April. Livingstone felt as if he—not they—had been flung into a void. There was no more purchasing and packing, no more children's exuberance or parental injunctions. In the turmoil before their departure, he had realised that the youngsters would not comprehend the loss of their father, and was stricken with the injustice of it. It did not occur to him that in the coming years they would believe he had forgotten them.

He was bereft and unwell. The surgery that was accomplished at last made him feel all the worse. Only the peace and solace of the veld would be curative now, but he could not make his departure. Even with every chore accomplished (new axles on the good wagon, the old one abandoned, an endless list of purchases made), he was still waiting for permission to buy a few pounds of gunpowder. He had applied to the authorities, but they were restricting the purchase of munitions and suspected missionaries more than others of fomenting rebellion among "natives". Frustration drove him to an altercation with a postmaster who overtaxed him for letters from England, and he found himself threatened with a libel suit which would have delayed his impending journey even longer. He narrowly escaped by paying up, with apologies, though this solution for the predicament hardly suited his temperament.

When his hours were not filled with fuming exasperation they were desolate. He wrote to Mary that he saw "no face now to be compared with that sunburnt one which has so often greeted me with its kind looks". They would surely be rewarded, he said, for patience and right living: "Let us do our duty to our



Saviour, and we shall meet again. I wish that time were now". Then, though he was not a man given to sentiment, he added:

You may read the letters over again which I wrote at Mabotsa, the sweet time you know. As I told you before, I tell you again, they are true, true; there is not a bit of hypocrisy in them. I never show all my feelings; but I can say truly, my dearest, that I loved you when I married you, and the longer I lived with you, I loved you the better ...<sup>150</sup>

To his beloved five-year-old Agnes, he wrote:

I have no Nannee now. I have given you back to Jesus your friend, your papa who is in Heaven. He is above you, but he is also near you. You may ask everything you need from Him, and he will hear you ... You must love your brothers and Mamma, and never tease them or be naughty, for Jesus does not like to see naughtiness<sup>151</sup>.

Her father was still there, he told her, in the town where she had seen him waving goodbye on the quay. He would be off soon with Malatsi, who cared for the oxen, to trek back to Sebetwane's country where the chief's wives had given honey and milk to her and Robert.

Half a year after his inspiration for the salvation of the subcontinent, his spirits sank to a low ebb. It was very like the time at Kolobeng when he had waited for Oswell alone and felt thwarted in his determination to be away. He had missed his children then, but had the solace of knowing that if God granted him safety he would see them again before many months passed. Now his separation from his family seemed irrevocable. Regret closed in on him, and self-doubt was its companion. Other biographers have described his fits of depression. None have suggested that regret and remorse played a role now in the darkest melancholia he had yet experienced. He had been devastated by the family's departure, though the decision for their going had been his, and he was being thwarted in the very purpose for which they had been sacrificed.

As before, he reacted with hostility towards his missionary society, and society in general. They were obvious adversaries, comfortably out of reach and easier prey than the adversary within. His words were bitter and eloquent, even apocalyptic, as they so often were in his despair:

My children are absolutely vagabonds. 'When shall we return to Kolobeng? When to Kuruman?' Never! The mark of Cain is on your foreheads, your father is a missionary<sup>152</sup>.

He defended his decision to Arthur Tidman: his children had been too long in a country of heathens and tyrannising emigrants. He had got his youngsters out of the way before "moral contagion" could infect them, but the cost to both himself and the children was inestimable. For his loss of them and their loss of a home he blamed conditions in Africa and the demands of Christian society on its clergy. It would not have served his purpose to acknowledge that no other missionaries in Africa had felt the need to send their families away.

Eventually kind acquaintances and the challenge of work dulled sorrow. The Surveyor-General expressed admiration for his exploits. Cape Town was not entirely stifling after all. Thomas Maclear, the Astronomer Royal, praised him for



the accuracy of his calculations of latitude. Maclear instructed him further, and he came away from the great man's observatory with confidence that he could go east or west from Linyanti and calculate with exactitude the distance to either coast. He purchased a nautical almanac, and felt again the exhilaration of a man on the brink of a great undertaking. In his new clothes, stern and resolute, with sextant in one hand and chronometer in the other, he had his portrait made.

He had applied to export three guns, 100 pounds (45kg) of lead, and 75 pounds (34kg) of gunpowder, little enough for what he had in mind, but enough to raise suspicion with a government desperately trying to contain rebellion and lawlessness. Stubbornly refusing to smuggle, he felt he should wait a little longer, and then leave if necessary without the guns or ammunition.

He was amazed at the extent of insecurity and confusion in the Colony and on its borders. There had been an attack on a mission station that had left the missionary's son dead, his body mutilated. Mission work had been severely curtailed, almost brought to a standstill, yet missionaries were taking the blame for the unrest. They were thought to be too liberal. John Philip, Superintendent of the Society when Livingstone arrived in South Africa, had stood firmly for black rights, and his influence had protected Africans from *voortrekker* discrimination in Natal. Since then the pendulum had swung, and the government had forgotten Philip's warning that *voortrekkers* would oppress Africans in the Transvaal. The authorities were on the brink of a major compromise with the emigrants there, and the situation was tense.

Then the dike broke. Warrants for the arrest of Boer leaders were rescinded, and within weeks two British commissioners were sitting down with the same rebels at a farm on the Sand River. The British Government had decided that it could no longer police the northern border of their colony so would create an accord by which the Boers would do it for them beyond the Vaal. Andries Pretorius, who had carried a price on his head of £2,000 for an attack against the British, proclaimed himself Commandant General of the South African Republic in the Transvaal with the full approval of the British—if not of his Boer rivals.

To missionaries the Sand River Convention was senseless. The fact that it did not recognise the Republic as a state was irrelevant; it gave clear licence for Boer expansion, with a guarantee of non-interference. With the Vaal River the only designated boundary, the Boers could extend to the sea on one side, across the Kalahari and beyond on the other, and only *tsetse* fly would keep them from building kraals as far north as they liked. "Sand River" was an accord made by irresponsible British authorities with an unscrupulous Boer incumbent who would not honour safeguards for the African. The British had pledged to sell no more arms to Africans and make no more treaties to pacify chiefs, whose people were left defenceless, and Pretorius had taken his first step against them by seizing control of "the missionary road" to the north. He had ordered all wagons to be stopped, taxed and searched for contraband arms. He arrested one adventurer for publishing an account of his journey to Ngami because it would encourage other travellers.

Livingstone was finally allowed to buy guns and ammunition, and departed on the road to Kuruman in early June, a full three months after his arrival in Cape





*David Livingstone on his family's departure, 1852*



Town. The wagon weighed more than 2 tons and was "enormously heavy", carrying goods he had bought for himself, Moffat and almost everyone else at Kuruman. There was a huge number of gifts reluctantly acquired from various sources: a parcel given by a mission school that "might", he observed, be religious pictures, a quantity of apple trees and other oddments suitable only for a permanent abode. Kuruman would be a convenient dumping ground for such articles.

His pace was slowed by lack of oxen as much as by weight. He was going in as he had come out, with one team and none to spare. It may have been that he had chosen not to avail himself any further of Oswell's generosity, or that—like a lame beggar made whole—he clung to his crutch. His method of proceeding with too few animals had become second nature. He stopped frequently and traded lean ones for fresh ones, paying a few shillings each time for the extra flesh on their bones.

While the woodwork of the wagon creaked and groaned, he noted with pride that the new axles held. He seemed completely absorbed in his ridiculous task, but chided himself for the folly in a letter to his London office. Overloading a perfectly good wagon was the sort of thing he would do once in a lifetime, he observed, and that seemed justification for the eccentricity. There were other signs that he had become unbalanced since his family had gone, but the state of mind was hardly unusual for him. He had a tendency to exaggerate a challenge, and the trial of the moment was manoeuvring a great load along a track all alone. There was no necessity to travel alone, and the Society had made a firm recommendation that he secure a companion, preferably a missionary. His preference, nevertheless, was to choose no one at all. Characteristically, he shot back a reply, saying that he had got all the way to the Paarl River without anyone to look after him and had not "fallen into mischief once"!

The man who required such extraordinary scope savoured the pleasure of being in the open plains. There was time to read, push on with the language and compile his dictionary of Setswana. The dictionary was a pleasant, absorbing occupation, but as with others he had no intention of devoting himself to it. He had just heard a disturbing rumour that Sechele had slipped from the narrow path. He was said to have plundered the wagon of the trader Moyle. If true, it reflected a significant regression that had nothing to do with Moyle's own dishonesty; Livingstone would accept no mitigation.

He moved along in solitude except for his cattle boys and was deep in thought. He was increasingly persuaded that the man who had been his convert had become an apostate. He was perfectly aware that Sechele, in his isolation from Christian influence, had fallen in with "some very bad fellows", but this was no excuse whatsoever for relapse. As with his old partner, Edwards, he was inclined to think the worst of people—especially those he had forsaken to get on as best they could without him.

Indeed, every aspect of Sechele's life—worship, politics, material assets—had eroded with the loss of "his missionary", but he was resourceful. He had fallen back on the kind and generous Moffats. For love of Christian living, expediency or both, he had sent four of his children to Kuruman for schooling,



and these were in the house with *Mma-Mary* when Livingstone arrived one afternoon at the end of August. There were Sechele's heir Sebele, about nine years old, and three daughters by former wives. Livingstone remarked on how like his father Sebele looked and acted.

The next day was the first of September, 1852. Livingstone, finally among people with whom he felt comfortable, got down to the finer points of planning his onward journey and the mending of a wheel. It had not been wise, after all, to overload. When the repair was finished, he intended to hire men and set out at long last on the great journey that no one had ever made. The first leg would be through familiar places—Dimawe to see his Bakwena, then Kolobeng to collect coffee and provisions from his house. He did not know that he would never see either place again. On that very day, a commando of Boers had opened fire on Sechele and the Bakwena, and the Bakaa and Bakgatla who took refuge with them.

Trouble had been brewing while Livingstone had been in Cape Town. The Boers had committed themselves on paper to keeping peace in the Transvaal at the same time that they were organising a "war action" against "unruly chiefs", foremost amongst them Sechele. Pieter Scholtz, the tough commandant of Marico, had been commissioned by Commandant General Pretorius to secure the immediate surrender of the "*kaffir*" dissidents or beat them into the ground.

Scholtz had summoned the chiefs and told them in the boldest terms that the land had been given to his people by the British, and they were expected to comply with Boer authority. Sechele, who knew that *dikgosi* had been captured in such "meetings", had wisely stayed away. Mosielele of Mabotsa, who attended, went away vowing that he would escape into the desert if the new "owners" of the land made any more demands upon his people. He had paid them their so-called tax, in men, grain and oxen, but they always wanted more.

In April, in the weeks after the Sand River Convention, an epidemic had swept through the farms along the Marico River, killing hundreds in a matter of days. Every Boer patriarch who had vowed to ride against the rebel chiefs leaving "widows and orphans" saw widows and orphans among his own people, and some of these men saw a judgement on their plan. The men of Marico who survived the scourge buried their dead and their thoughts of war, while chiefs developed a new and false sense of security. Mosielele stayed at home in Mabotsa, sending excuses to the Boer farmers who demanded uncompensated labour and encouraging his people to "lift" cattle from their herds. Sechele continued to ignore the tax demand, and made himself increasingly conspicuous by providing Mosielele with guns and ammunition. He ordered his people to prevent two Boer hunting parties from passing through his country.

Gradually, the Boers regained their old animosity, and noted that Sechele was sitting strategically astride "the road" at Dimawe, providing guns to other chiefs and guides and hospitality to every English traveller who passed through. Paranoia returned and increased until they thought they saw Englishmen outflanking them to retake the Transvaal.

By early August, when Livingstone had been approaching Kuruman, the Boer leaders had recovered their health and belligerence to revive the *krijgsraad* they



had organised to spy on the tribes the year before. Scholtz put out an order for volunteers from among the farmers to mount the largest commando the Transvaal had ever seen. He made it clear that if necessary he would conscript farmers, but there was no need. By 23 August almost 500 armed and mounted farmers had assembled with eighty wagons, hundreds of Bastard and Hottentot servants who would handle supplies and load weapons beside their masters and as many as 600 Tswana "auxiliaries" press-ganged into support of the commando. They would act as herders, firewood gatherers, water carriers—and cannon fodder—a human shield without weapons to defend themselves, though the families they had left behind depended on them for their survival<sup>153</sup>. The Bahurutshe of Gopane had acceded to the Boer demand for conscripts, while Montshiwa of the Barolong resisted, and would not have to wait long before his people paid the price in reprisals against him.

On 17 August Scholtz rode out of Marico with 430 horsemen and a larger number of Africans pressed into service<sup>154</sup>. Approaching Mabotsa, he sent word ahead for Edwards to evacuate because he was coming to seize Mosielele. On arrival, however, he found that his quarry had fled to Sechele, while Edwards, determined to promote the cause of peace, had stayed where he was! Scholtz was furious, but despatched Edwards in safety and aimed his anger at the Bakgatla. Those who had not escaped with their *kgosi* found themselves in the line of fire. They were shot down as they ran, seventeen in all, and none had been able to defend themselves.

As Mosielele appeared at Dimawe begging asylum Sechele found that it suited him to bring the situation with the Boers to a head. He took in Mosielele, the lesser chief, according to custom, as a father takes a child into his protection, and was fully aware of the consequences he faced. Hasty preparations were soon underway. He made sure his men were armed, ammunition counted, supplies checked and valuables hidden. He dispatched herdboys with his cattle toward Kuruman, fearing that they would not get away quickly enough. He sent an urgent message for support from the Ngwaketse chief Sentufe at Kanye: old rivals could fight among themselves another day, but now it was time to stand together against the Boers.

Three days later the Boers were *in laager* upstream of Dimawe, threatening attack unless Sechele relinquished the renegade Mosielele. The improbability of a Boer commandant sending a message instead of a raiding party was not lost on Sechele. He sensed that his politics of strength were paying off, and took the offensive verbally. He told Scholtz that he had more fighting men than were in the commando, and boasted of guns, ammunition—and a cannon he almost certainly did not have. Baiting his adversary, he said that he would advise him where to graze his cattle since some of the grass was poisoned, and the Boer cattle—almost Sechele's cattle now—should be protected! Then he added that since the Boers seemed reluctant to fight he might lend them some ammunition!

Thus Sechele taunted the enemy. When Scholtz told him to send his women and children out of the way, he replied that he would do as he liked with his own people. When Mebalwe and Kgosidintsi begged him to come to terms while there was still an opportunity to save their lives he ignored them, apparently suffering



from delusions of invincibility. In fact, he sensed that bravado was an effective psychological weapon, but he was imprudent in its use. To this he added a move that would prove a grave mistake. He said that he had "looked into his Book" and listened to his preacher, and decided that he should neither strike the first blow nor fight on the Sabbath. It was Saturday, and he was inviting Scholtz to postpone hostilities until Monday.

Scholtz, who was generally considered a "God-fearing" man, obliged him. Next morning, the commando wound its way downstream through a cluster of hills. Kwena sentinels, perched high in the rocks, could be seen taking aim but Scholtz ordered his men to keep their guns down. Within reach of Dimawe, they made camp and watered their cattle without a skirmish, but tension mounted in the commando. Besides Sechele's defiance Scholtz had the unpredictability of his men to contend with. Too many of them were young, excitable, and could not be relied upon to endure the slightest provocation. Too many were out only for booty or to make a name for themselves. At Mabotsa he had ordered them to leave Edwards' house alone, but later had to court-martial two of them for looting<sup>155</sup>. He could hardly hope, with one commando, to solve the problems of the whole western front, but his greatest worry was that he might make things worse. Disorder in his ranks could make the assignment quite impossible.

A few of his men were even-tempered and principled. Hungry to hear the Word of God, and often lacking the ability to read it, they attended Mebalwe's service in the new mud church that Sabbath at Dimawe. Their characteristic disregard of blacks as humans and Christians, nevertheless, soon became apparent as they returned to *laager* to prepare to kill the same people with whom they had worshipped.

Dawn broke on the Monday, and the Boers opened fire. The noise was deafening. Terrified townspeople ran in all directions. Mebalwe, who had preached to the Boers in an exhausted state of nerves the day before, now faced a quantlet. Catching sight of his clothes, shabby but English in style, they shouted scornfully that the "chief" had arrived, and fired wildly all around him so that they could watch the gentle, temperate man run panic-stricken and barefoot over sharp rocks to save his life.

The town had been built at the base of a rocky outcrop. The aggressors advanced uphill towards it, driving the Bahurutshe with firebrands in front of them as a human shield<sup>156</sup>. They stormed Kwena positions and set fire to huts. Then the whole hill was enveloped in fire, and the Kwena combatants entrenched among the boulders could not aim for the heat and smoke. Bakgatla and Bangwaketse threw down their guns and fled, while the Bakwena fell back to find new positions, and the carnage continued. Kwena dead lay with guns in hand. The wounded hid to save their lives. Women carrying children stumbled and fell in headlong flight to reach the plain.

Then the plains were alight. Fields of planted grain blazed while a Boer cannon blasted away at the hill. Leaden balls slammed into the rocks and the men in them, and the air was acrid with the smell of sulphur. Shots ricocheted, killing one Boer with his friend's bullet. Sechele himself took a musket ball through his



hat and another through his jacket. His servant was killed while he loaded his master's gun.

At least sixty Bakwena were dead<sup>157</sup>. Others had been killed among Sechele's allies though they had made a poor showing of resistance. Few Boers had died. The Boers themselves reported only three or four deaths, but the full list of casualties was much greater. The official report to the *Volksraad*, accepted as authority by historians, misleadingly cited only white deaths, but twenty or more servants and an indeterminate number of Batswana "auxiliaries" died for the Boer cause<sup>158</sup>. Others, Boers and Africans, died of their wounds<sup>159</sup>. Deaths among the hardened Transvaal raiders came to at least half the number killed among the Bakwena, who had never fought with guns before. While the Bakwena had sustained the heaviest casualties, there was no precedent for the casualties they had inflicted. Six hours after the first shot was fired, Sechele and twenty men still held out in the boulders, "like rock rabbits" said the Boers, who were amazed at their tenacity. The Transvaal force had been exhausted, demoralised and frightened, and they had not even succeeded in putting an end to the contest.

The Boers had taken two rocky ridges, but could not drive the Bakwena from the third. As night fell they decided to withdraw and return at first light to rout the rebels. In the morning they found the bodies of their dead stripped of clothes, guns and ammunition by Bakwena who had fled into the darkness. Angry and frustrated, Scholtz ordered his men to pursue the rebels, but they found only old men, women and children cowering among the rocks and scrub growth. Sechele and his men had vanished into the thirstland, while the Transvaalers, whose reputation had been to strike and disappear, were tied down with the cumbersome job of mopping up.

A huge herd of a thousand cattle, eleven horses and hundreds of sheep and goats was rounded up to send back to Mabotsa, and the area was combed for valuables. Bakwena taken prisoner were led about and beaten until they pointed out Sechele's caches. Forty-eight guns and hundreds of pounds of ivory were collected. Two wagons were found hidden under a rock shelf, one Sechele's and the other that of the trader McCabe, who had gone north with his partners and left eighty head of cattle and provisions which were now lost to the Boers<sup>160</sup>. A long list of miscellaneous goods and confiscated "rarities" appeared in the commandant's report—tools, books and a notebook, and two chairs with a familiar description: folding, metal, interlaced with brass wire. The baptismal ceremony of the man the Boers called "the kaffir chief Segele" had been graced by two such chairs.

The whole lot was loaded onto wagons to be carried to Mabotsa, where the commando would arrive on 11 September to mount an auction that would fetch 8,000 Rix Dollars from seized possessions, equipment, grain and herds. The scramble among commando members competing for "curiosities" in particular revealed the cultural deprivation of their self-proclaimed superior race. *Voortrekkers* had escaped authority in the Cape at the expense of knowledge, literature and the artefacts of their European forebears. Now these Afrikaners, who were quick to buy all the English factory articles they could lay their hands



upon, were just as quick to ignore the fact that every item had been cherished by people they considered little more advanced than the animals of the wild.

Not all the spoils of war were recorded as moveable property and sold at Mabotsa. Among the notes passed by Scholtz to his superiors to advise them of the outcome of the commando raid were facts that never found their way into the official report. There was no mention of two hundred women and four hundred children taken prisoner, among them Mokgokong, former wife of Sechele, and her children. She had fled with her infant, born out of marriage, and her two other children that included Sechele's eldest son, Kgari. It had been a grave misfortune that Kgari had not been safely at school at Kuruman with his father's other children.

Nor did the report say that grain had been confiscated in such quantity that eighty wagons could not carry it and the rest of the booty; a dozen more wagons had been required. The grain was the abundance of the first Kwena harvest, food that would have fed four thousand Bakwena and almost as many Bakaa and Bakgatla who lived under Sechele's protection. Hunger was now the only harvest of Dimawe, and it would last as long as drought had lasted at Kolobeng.

Nearly a week went by at Mabotsa, and Scholtz still did not give the order to inspan. He had other business to attend to, including reprisal against the Bangwaketse who had come to Sechele's aid. He ordered out a party of raiders against Kanye. When they found the town deserted they set fire to houses and crops in a collective fit of rage. They did not, however, do the job "properly", Scholtz learned with vexation, and his chance to drive out the Bangwaketse permanently had been lost in the confusion. He had been as dispirited as his men when there was no clear rout at Dimawe; now he was more exasperated than ever with their undisciplined behaviour.

He sent off a rider to ask Pretorius for permission to withdraw, admitting his failure to deal with the unrest among his men. His messages reflected the despair of a competent but unsuccessful combatant: the commando had scattered as many rebels as it had disarmed; Marico was no safer now than it had been before<sup>161</sup>. Indeed, Sechele had escaped with a few tough and rebellious Bakwena, enough weapons to fight another day and the will to continue rallying dissidents on the very edge of the Transvaal. As a *coup de grace*, two Boer hunting parties had been cut off in their return from the north and were being held hostage by Sekgoma, who might murder every member. It was known that, after what had happened at Dimawe, Sechele had sent an order to all *dikgosi* to apprehend and kill all Boers in their territories, and it was known that Sekgoma would do everything he could to avenge his "brother".

In the aftermath of the bloodshed at Dimawe, when the smoke had cleared from the air and from their minds, Scholtz and his men realised that the raid had only exacerbated their problems with the Batswana. They were overwhelmed with the impulse to find a scapegoat. It was Livingstone, they believed, who had incited the blacks to rebel and taught them to fight. His mission, if not his person, was close at hand.

Scholtz assembled a patrol under a man named Schutte and sent it off to Kolobeng to make a reconnaissance of the deserted mission. The patrol took



four empty wagons and returned the same day. Tales of looting and destruction followed. The official report did not mention any disorder or misuse of property, however, but simply stated that—according to the patrol's Kwena prisoners—Sechele had opened the house in his eleventh hour preparations at Dimawe. The patrol found two percussion rifles<sup>162</sup>, but did not explain how they could have been overlooked if Sechele had carried out a desperate, thieving invasion of the property looking for weapons.

One room, presumably the missionary's workshop, the report said, was found locked and undisturbed. They broke it open and found so many gun mechanisms that the place resembled, not a mission, but "a small-arms factory" with "more gunsmith's tools than Bibles"!<sup>163</sup> They already had information, they stated, that Sechele had bought thirteen guns from Livingstone only weeks before the battle—an impossibility in view of the fact that Livingstone had left the area a full nine months previously!

Whether it was guns that they found in quantity or simply the tools to mend them, they were outraged and felt sufficiently justified in confiscating every piece of moveable property on the premises and carrying it away on their wagons to add to the spoils of Dimawe. The ill-gotten collection included almost everything that the Livingstones had ever owned.

A few weeks later, the adventurer James Chapman, a remarkable Capetonian of English and Flemish descent, was returning with a Boer hunting party from Ngamiland when he heard reports of bloodshed at Dimawe. He was at once swept up in the swell of fear and violence that followed the event. A man who normally avoided the intrigues and conflicts of the interior, Chapman suddenly found himself taken prisoner by the Bangwato, who suspected him of being a Boer like his travelling companions. Fortunately, Sekgoma recognised him and the individualistic Jan Viljoen whom he held in high regard. Chapman and Viljoen with their partners got off with a dire warning, and all rode away with their lives. The Boers made their way home, badly shaken, and Chapman continued along the trail to Kolobeng and Dimawe.

In his journals, Chapman describes what he found when he reached Kolobeng. While still some distance from the mission, Chapman wrote, he caught sight of the torn and weathered pages of hundreds of books. These proved to be Setswana Bibles and religious tracts, all "wantonly and sacrilegiously torn to pieces" and "blowing like down" over the empty *veld*<sup>164</sup>. Other accounts would prove amazingly similar in their metaphor. Moffat would repeat a tale he had heard that the valley looked "as if a number of hawks had been dealing death & destruction among a flock of white pidgeons"<sup>165</sup>.

When Chapman reached the house at Kolobeng he found the ground littered with broken medicine bottles and splintered window frames. The furniture that he had seen there before was missing from the house—every bedstead, table, chair, desk, chest and many pieces that had come from Kuruman as a gift from Mary Moffat. No corn mill was to be found anywhere, nor anything else from the kitchen, larder or storeroom. The workshop was empty of tools and vice; bellows and anvil were gone from the forge. Everything that could not be carried away lay on the ground broken to pieces.



Chapman did not suspect the Bakwena. He knew as well as any traveller in the region that Sechele had always posted guards to protect the Livingstones' property in their absence. Chapman assumed that the wreckage was the work of the Transvaal republicans. He often travelled with Transvaalers and maintained a strong rapport with them, but he knew them for what they were: men with no tolerance for any creed, colour, language or authority other than their own; men who were often undisciplined and unschooled, easily infuriated, and so intimidated by any book except their own Dutch Bible that they could tear it up and throw it upon the ground. He recorded his sympathy for Livingstone in his journal and rode on toward Dimawe, where he saw the timbers of houses burnt black like the fields, graves and bones lying among them—and other things, he noted cryptically, that were too awful to describe<sup>166</sup>.

When Scholtz and his men and wagons finally lumbered away from Dimawe, they had the appearance of *voortrekkers* carrying everything they owned, lock, stock and barrel. Unlike their *trekker* forebears, however, who had driven only herds of animals into the Marico Valley, these men led human captives.

Rogers Edwards, now the Reverend Edwards, and his friend Walter Inglis saw them as they passed through Matebe, north of Mabotsa, where Inglis lived. This was where Edwards had taken his family when it became clear that his own mission would be overrun. He had joined his family there after the onset of hostilities, bringing as much furniture and other property as his wagon could carry.

Edwards and Inglis and their families watched as the commando passed through and saw with horror and disbelief that its members were driving Kwenana and Kgatla children like a herd of sheep down to the waterhole. Mothers were held separately from their children to discourage escape and prevent women from freeing children. Edwards and Inglis were shocked and sickened. They had lived among Boers on the edge of the Transvaal, treated their sick, welcomed them into their homes and makeshift churches, mediated in their disputes with the African people and held their tongues when they witnessed mistreatment. Now, at last, they were moved to protest at what they saw.

The protest took the form of a letter that followed Scholtz back to Marico to perch like a grim, accusing bird on the desk of the Commandant General. Edwards' meticulous script and formal Dutch asserted that, as man's inhumanity would be called to reckoning under God's Law, the Boer people would be called to judgement for the iniquity of separating parents and children. A secular tone followed, declaring that slavery was a violation of the Convention that the Colony and Europe would condemn. Finally, rhetoric moderated to an appeal for reason and subsided in a pitiful plea: "*Kaffirs* love their children as we whites!"<sup>167</sup>

The Commandant General and his *Raad* reacted to the letter with the fury of men caught in the act of injustice. Inglis was hauled up before the *Landrost* at Rustenburg in November, and both he and Edwards were expelled from the territory. The perceptive Chapman had anticipated their fate. As he put it, they had "always placed a little too much confidence in the integrity of the Boers"<sup>168</sup>.

When the men of the commando arrived home their women and children were overjoyed. Then there was mourning for the loss of some, relief at the return of



others and the inevitable exuberance over prizes taken. There was quarrelling, though, as widows learned that they would not receive their dead husbands' share of the plunder, and there were opponents and dissenters. One old man named van Tonder turned his sons out of the house because they had brought into it the spoils of war and children taken away from their homes. The farmer-politician Jan Viljoen, whose wife was a missionary's daughter, had resisted Scholtz's call to war by dropping out of sight on Chapman's expedition<sup>169</sup>; now he reappeared to protest the needlessness of violence and accuse Scholtz of bringing down on his people "the enmity of all the tribes"<sup>170</sup>.

There was also fear. The commando had travelled every mile homeward in the certain knowledge that rebels pursued them who were intent on cutting off stragglers. Ordinary travellers were being stopped by armed men bent on murder if they proved to be Boers. The distraught wives of the missing hunters questioned every passing trader for news of their men.

The people of the western Transvaal stayed in *laager* for a long time, and did not come out to go to their farms. Men of the Bakwena and Barolong turned insurgent, stealing great numbers of cattle, so that the farmers had to keep their animals crowded close to their wagons, and great numbers of beasts sickened and died. The belligerents burned crops and buildings, and many Boer homesteads stood in ruins. The farmers tried in vain to form a new commando to repair the damage done to their security, but Pretorius' authority broke down after allegations that he had absented himself during the hostilities not for sickness but for safety. Labour tax became a thing of the past, and there was insufficient labour to maintain Boer farms. After months of suffering and intimidation at the hands of an enemy they had grossly underestimated the farmers gathered what remained of their herds, and fled from their cherished Marico Valley to live in Magaliesberg and Potchefstroom.

When Livingstone learned that the Bakwena had been attacked and routed with great loss of life, he realised that all the delays of the last few months had saved his life. Indeed, by divine favour or an almost uncanny sense of self-preservation he had avoided the disaster. If he had been a few weeks or even days earlier completing the protracted preparations for his great journey, he would have reached Kuruman and passed on to Kolobeng and Dimawe, where he would have met the full force of the Boer wrath.

He and Sechele had both provoked the Transvaalers, but Sechele bore the brunt of their anger. As to the enslavement of children, Livingstone had deplored it long ago, but it was Edwards and Inglis who were martyred in the cause. Livingstone's life appeared charmed, sometimes at the expense of others. Mebalwe, who had once prevented his teacher's death in the jaws of a lion, and then took his place among the Bakwena, faced his ordeal alone at Dimawe, where he almost lost his life along with everything he owned.

To the cause of Kwenana liberty Livingstone had contributed his philosophy, gun-mending skills and protective presence, and Sechele had accepted them with alacrity. In his years with Livingstone he had found a confidence that he had heated and moulded into an opiate of self-delusion, and then rushed headlong into a battle he could not win. He had risked everything, yet had survived to go on threatening and harassing the Boers by simple obstinacy.



His teacher, meanwhile, was stepping away—to contemplate his failures and blame them on the Transvaal, his unheeding Bakwena and drought—and to watch from a distance. Livingstone had become the prophet who marks the doom of people who have no ears to hear. The Bakwena, the Bangwaketse and the Bakgatla, he prophesied, had brought divine judgement raining upon their heads in death and destruction because they had rejected the Word! If he had foreseen the spread of Christianity among Tswana peoples, however, he might still have taken credit for its adoption.

Livingstone's reactions to events were complicated, as ever. While he ridiculed the Bakwena from his vantage point at Kuruman he nevertheless took pride in their mettle, almost cheering them on. It had been reported that his best scholars had been the best fighters; his "*Bakwains*" were not like the broken-spirited Hottentots, he boasted, and people would hear of them yet! Besides, he shared their cause. The Boers, he declared, had resolved to shut up the interior, and he had resolved to open it, and it would be clear soon enough who would succeed!

Livingstone's campaign to influence British policy regarding the Boers had already begun; now it would intensify. He would carry his cause in a few years time into the text of the book he would write and lectures he would deliver to a British public increasingly convinced of the case for British protection of the African against the immigrant farmer. Indeed, the Transvaalers in their campaign of destruction in 1852 had made a major tactical error: they had involved Livingstone, and they had involved the African chief conspicuous as his convert and politically ingenious in his own right. In the propaganda campaign that would ensue, Livingstone would have all the advantage against the Transvaalers, who were generally inarticulate in their own defence. The bias against the Afrikaner generated in Britain at that time would remain influential for many years.

Livingstone could not turn away entirely from the needless casualties and terrible suffering his people had sustained. Word trickled in to Kuruman that Kwenas dead and wounded had been abandoned to hyenas, survivors had flung themselves into the thirstland without water and hundreds of captives had been taken. Small children had been tied into Boer wagons; others had been made to walk, weeping and crying for their mothers. He only wished Sechele had not thrown away his advantage by refusing to strike the first blow. He blamed Mebalwe for that display of Christian principle, though his protege had simply lived by Livingstone's doctrine.

If the missionary blamed the Bakwena and Sechele and Mebalwe, then he blamed the Boers even more. The people of Sechele, he pointed out, had never harmed the Boer farmers or done anything beyond refusing to submit to them. In his estimation, the problem always came back to the Boers' hypocritical show of piety. They ran to baptise their children, he said, whenever a preacher rode by, and partook of the Lord's Supper like famished souls. Scholtz was known as "God-fearing" because he prayed on the eve of a battle. His men, rumour had it, shouted for God's deliverance every time they were struck. Yet they had all ridden away like Old Testament warriors, justifying their deeds with the words of Deuteronomy-



As you approach a city to fight against it, first offer it a truce... If it refuses, ... kill every male in the city; but you may keep for yourselves all the women, children, cattle, and booty ...<sup>171</sup>

*Mma-Sebele*, Sechele's remaining wife, who had carried with dignity the office of queen, appeared at the door of the Moffats' house worn out and in rags. Sechele had begged space for her in the wagon of a Griqua hunter who could take her to safety and reunite her with Sebele and the other children. Shaken and exhausted, she told how in the thick of the battle she had hidden in the cleft of a rock with her youngest. To distract and keep the child quiet, she had taken off her ivory armlets, and succeeded in saving both their lives.

Sechele, unaware that Livingstone was still at Kuruman, had sent a letter to Moffat:

My Friend of my heart's love and of all the confidence of my heart, it is I, Sechele. The Boers have been too much for me. They attacked me though I had done no wrong. They wanted me to be under their rule, but I refused .... And they plundered Livingstone's house, taking all his goods ...<sup>172</sup>

Descriptions of the looted house had already reached Livingstone. He had tried to visualise the empty shell without the furniture he and Mary had collected, window glass he had set, woodwork he had made. Yet the loss of his books—a good library and his “solace in solitude”—was his greater anguish. Worse still was the knowledge that such wealth of thought and spirit had been torn up and thrown to the winds. If the culprits had made any use of the books, or even of his medicines, he lamented, he might have forgiven them.

Moffat felt the loss as if it were his own. He was appalled at the ignorance—or evil—embodied in such mindless destruction. The Boers, he said, had destroyed “the sacred volume” in Hebrew, Greek and English and the translation into the vernacular that represented thirty years of his life. Only two small volumes of Livingstone's books had been salvaged, one poetry and the other meditations, that had been brought to Kuruman by a traveller who found them some distance from the house—as if pitched away “like stones”.

Before September was out Livingstone had written to Lieutenant Governor Darling at the Cape to report that he had been deprived of more than £150 worth of the medicines, surgical instruments and books of his medical and ministerial professions and more than £185 in furniture and chattels. More important to him than redress, however, was his desire for action to prevent the men of the Transvaal from any more lawlessness. To the government at Bloemfontein he also made his case, satisfied in the knowledge that two brothers of the British Resident himself had been among those who lost cattle at Dimawe and supplies stored in his house at Kolobeng. He wrote to the Reverend William Thompson, the Society's agent in Cape Town with a report of the bloodshed and destruction, requesting him to submit it to the newspapers.

The Colonial Government as he had come to know it in 1841, however, no longer existed. In reply Governor Cathcart told him bluntly that his losses were no more than he could expect in unsettled territory, and the Convention prevented any intervention beyond the Vaal. It was his duty, the Governor pointed





*After the raid*



out, to remind Livingstone as he would anyone else who chose to live in the area that he did so at his own risk.

It would not take long for the London Missionary Society to accept the harsh realities described in Cathcart's uncongenial letter. Missionaries of the Society had built three stations on the edge of the Transvaal, and every one had been destroyed. Many years would elapse before the LMS supported the establishment of any new missions. Livingstone's attempts to attract missionaries, and the LMS in particular, into the interior had been abruptly curtailed as a result of his politics of confrontation.

The Society found no reason to blame him. The directors waited attentively to observe and assist in his new enterprise to the extent that they could comprehend it. Assured at last of their support, he still faced an endless string of time-consuming obstacles, and he was well past the date he had intended to depart for the north. He had not been able to secure any drivers, cattle boys or servants. It had become obvious that in each man's excuse for not going lay a determination to avoid dangerous country, especially with someone as much a target of the Boers as Livingstone. Projecting himself mentally into that journey, he was convinced that with every mile he travelled, he would run the risk of being captured and even murdered<sup>173</sup>.

He was further delayed by an encounter with Sechele, who was travelling south bent on persuading the Colonial Government to revoke the Sand River Convention, now so flagrantly violated by the Boers. The trader Green and young Edwards were with him, lending moral support and hoping to gain compensation for property that they had left behind at Dimawe and Kolobeng and had lost in the raid.

Sechele was delighted to come upon his teacher, and told him with pride that he had resisted all opportunities for reprisal against the Boers. He was certain, he said, that the Governor would discern his sincerity and the worth of his cause. He pressed Livingstone to come with him: the *moruti's* presence would guarantee the success of his effort. Livingstone declined in favour of his own expedition, and warned him that he should not expect assistance from the Governor. Sechele's replied that, if need be, he would go to the Queen, and went on his determined way.

Soon Livingstone heard that Sechele had reached Bloemfontein, where Her Majesty's Forces kindly contributed from their own pockets to assist him with his onward journey, but the intrepid Mokwena, who could survive in the thirstland but had never travelled beyond its southern margin, found the residents of Cape Town quite a different sort. In the crowded alien town, where barter was useless and every move he made required money, he ran short of funds almost immediately. He presented his appeal in writing to the Governor, nevertheless. While waiting for a reply, he issued a statement to *The Cape Town Mail* that described atrocities at Dimawe and begged for an abolition of the arms embargo against Africans.

He sought out Reverend Thompson of the LMS to beg for help during his unforeseen delay, and to discuss his passage to England if the Governor declined to take his part against the Transvaalers. In the interview, Thompson



found Sechele "interesting", which meant perhaps that he considered him something of a curiosity. He was sympathetic. The chief, as he put it, had been so unfortunately "ill-used". It was a pity that nothing could be done for him! He explained to Sechele, with tactful hesitation, that the Society was unable to lend him funds toward a passage to England, and immediately the interview was concluded put pen to paper with a warning to the Secretary of State and his London office that the determined and resourceful African might somehow arrive in their midst!

Before Sechele left, Thompson gave him and his retinue a small sum from his own resources to see them home, with the stipulation that it not be used for any other purpose. The representative of the Society that stood for the welfare and Christianisation of the African people apparently believed that there were limits to liberty and self-determination.

Livingstone, oddly enough, concurred with Thompson. When he heard of Sechele's meeting in the Society's offices he wrote to Thompson that he had always reminded Sechele that his duty lay with his people, and not in being stared at as he most assuredly would be in England. To Tidman, he said something remarkably similar: that he had always been opposed "to exhibiting real or supposed converts prize cattle fashion"—with emphasis, no doubt, on the word "supposed"<sup>174</sup>. Thus Livingstone closed the chapter on Sechele's long-cherished dream of a pilgrimage to England and denied him the role he sought and may well have deserved of lobbying the British public for help in preserving his people's autonomy.

The Governor's letter, for which Sechele had journeyed to the Cape and waited for many months, came to his hand at last, but contained an outright denial that the British Government could do anything to alter the accord they had devised at Sand River. Sechele prepared to return home, where all that was left to him was to maintain a constant vigilance and close the road to Afrikaners. His achievements were greater than he realised. He had created a model for Batswana unity and a precedent for alliance between the Batswana and the British public. As he withdrew toward the thirstland his statement to *The Cape Town Mail* reached England, where it would be incorporated into an appeal by the Anti-Slavery Society and other influential organisations to the Secretary of State for the Colonies.

Livingstone had spent three months at Kuruman, and his outlook was suffering as it had at the Cape. He dwelt on his failures with the Bakwena, with Paul and Mebalwe—he did not say his family. A man of few friends except through correspondence, he confided his sense of defeat to Thompson, though they had met only recently in Cape Town. "Tell me some of your trials," he petitioned, seeking confidence. "I cannot help but believe you possess a great deal more prudence than I"<sup>175</sup>.

Gloom and regret fairly overwhelmed him precisely six months after his trough of despondency at the Cape. With travel his spirits had lifted, but another cycle had begun that had ended with new delays. He meditated, becoming more aware of the fragility of his existence and the grief he felt for his family. As before, out of his melancholia came an eloquent lament:



Am I on the way to die in Sebetuane's country? Have I seen the last of my wife and children? ... My soul, whither wilt thou emigrate? Where will thou lodge the first night after leaving the body?<sup>176</sup>

Eventually, he found the means to launch himself from Kuruman. He succeeded in hiring men, or at least some rogues that would suffice until he could find better men among the Bakololo. He set out at last and on the open veld found his optimism returning. His spirits lifted and rode so high that he knew they would not be diminished even when he reached the suffering Bakwena and the vicinity of his ruined mission. He had his pony and a single wagon that was loaded with the bare necessities of travel; he intended to make a dash past the Boers. "Overloading was a game he had played, and it no longer amused him. It felt good to be "lightened" and "ready to march". The pain in his chest that had persisted all the way from the Cape disappeared, and he found he was delighted after all to be the owner of few possessions.

January 1853 found him winding his way past Kanye, where he took the track furthest west toward Dithubaruba. There he would find the Bakwena, who had fled 25 miles (40km) west from Dimawe into the Dithejwane hills. It was the very place where he had found them under Bubi in 1842, when he had tried so enthusiastically to teach them to build a school and canal, and where they had tolerated his early, dogged efforts with the language.

At Tshongwane and Kolobeng, with more experience and commitment, he had tried to bring them to Christ but despaired of their unresponsiveness. He remembered what they used to say of themselves, that they did not even love each other. At Kolobeng, they had suspected him of witchcraft and cast him in the role of adversary, yet they had never raised a hand against him or his family or showed them anything but respect. He felt oddly reconciled to the Bakwena now, his quarrel with them over. Sechele had exhibited a most "satisfactory" attitude when they had met, and he felt he had judged him rather too harshly. There were still good readers among the Bakwena, he was told, and all of them kept the Sabbath. When he wrote again to Thompson he charged him with remembering that the seed had been sown among the Bakwena.

As he rode into the thirstland his pony sickened, and he had to lead him for 30 miles (48km). Rain had fallen last year, and it would fall again this year. The vines of the wild makatane would spread along the ground beneath the scrub thorns. Drought had broken; its cycle of seven years had ended. The Bakwena might well observe that drought had visited them with the missionary, and gone away when he left.

The great pity in the coming rain was that the Bakwena had nothing to plant. Hunger vied for whatever seed they had salvaged from Dimawe. Livingstone had brought grain from Kuruman, and Moffat had added his generous measure, but it would be little to share among many. The hungry people might have traded the game hides they lay upon to sleep, but their attackers had taken those too.

He came to the cave at Logageng, where he and Sechele had held the crowd spellbound with their courage. Behind it were the stony, fortress hills where the Bakwena had settled. Sechele's people and allies who lived among the rocks had nothing to their advantage now but numbers and inaccessibility. He saw the



gaunt, ragged men standing guard on the bluffs and at the springs and clusters of huts higher up. Wounds, illness and hunger had taken their toll. One man, struck by a bullet, had lost an eye; Chapman, when he passed through, had given him a phial of balsam to ease his pain. Livingstone saw the women who went down to the plain every day to scavenge for roots and berries, their faces haggard and pinched by worry for their lost children as much as by hunger. Of those who had escaped from capture none had returned with her children.

Sechele was not among them. As his people had fled Dimawe, some following the Boers to harass them, he had salvaged what he could from caches and set out on his desperate mission to the Colony, but had not yet returned. In his place, Kgosidintsi provided a more effective leadership than Livingstone acknowledged with his remark that a chief's duty was with his people. When three Bakwena were killed by Boers on the edge of the Transvaal Kgosidintsi dispatched a party to waylay and murder two in retaliation. The Boers began then to sue for peace—as men will do who cannot sleep at night—and Kgosidintsi refused to have anything to do with them.

In the stalemate that existed between farmers and rebels appeared Jan Viljoen, the maverick frontiersman who had protested against the needless bloodshed of the commando raid. Commandant General Pretorius wisely avoided censuring Viljoen for his criticism, and appointed him mediator with the Bakwena, hoping to bring them to negotiation. Viljoen discovered that Kgosidintsi would not talk until his brother's son Kgari had been returned, and he set to work to locate the boy.

In the first weeks after Dimawe the Boers had tried to use their captives as hostages to force Sechele to come to terms, but Sechele had refused to bargain. The captors subsequently allowed some of the women hostages to escape, while continuing to hold the children as more tractable, and thus more valuable, property. Then they distributed the children among the farms as indentured labour. When Viljoen located the boy Kgari, Pretorius paid his owner £15 for his "property", and a rendezvous was arranged at Kolobeng where Viljoen turned the child over to Kgosidintsi and his men, thus securing a ceasefire between Boers and Bakwena.

Kgari was taken to his mother Mokgokong, who had escaped and found her way to her people bereft of any hope that she would see her son again. It was a tearful reunion. The boy had sores on his body as a result of falling into the cooking fire in a Boer kitchen, and these had not been treated. Other women wept for the sons and daughters they would never see. The Boers would never release any child not essential to the negotiation.

Livingstone wrote to Mary that he had taken down the names of a hundred and twenty-four children still in captivity. She would know most of them, he said, because they had been her pupils. His letters to her during this period carried other sad news, for he told her that their house had been gutted and everything in it destroyed or carried away. "They brought four waggons down and took away sofa, table, bed, all the crockery, your desk..., smashed the wooden chairs and took away the iron ones..." and broke the "good iron door" that he had made for her oven. "They have taken away our sofa," he continued, and added in a tone that was almost jocular, "I never had a good rest on it! We had only got it ready



when we left." Then he said, with a resignation she may not have shared, "Well, they can't take away all the stones"<sup>177</sup>. Finally, in the way he had of twisting adversity round, he said he could "remove more easily" now that he had been considerably lightened!

He might have spared her any more sadness, but it was not in his nature to do so. He told her that he had intended to return to Kolobeng to survey the destruction and visit the grave of their little Elizabeth, but on the very day he had set aside to go with Kgosidintsi a message had arrived that the Boers would be there to hand over Kgari. He would be foolish, he had decided, to risk being caught "without reason". Kgosidintsi and his men had gone without him, carrying Livingstone's instruction to burn the house before they left it. Edwards' house had fallen into Boer hands, he told her, and he did not intend that theirs should as well.

He wrote to his children that every outspan he reached brought to mind scenes of their playing there. He wrote greetings in Setswana that he said Mamma must read to them so that they might not forget the language. For news, he wrote what he thought would be of interest: his white pony was dead and so were the other two, their beloved Pomberg and Choaeng. It was not that he had any desire to cause distress, only to teach, and the lesson in this case was that they were not like animals, without souls.

He wrote to Mary and the children often during the weeks of late 1852 and early 1853—more frequently, in fact, than he had ever written before or ever would again. He had reached the threshold and would soon be over it. The loose ends of their shared existence had been tied and smoothed away. Regret at their absence still lingered, but he would never allow it to overcome him. He had set his thoughts firmly on what lay ahead, and there was only a little time before he disappeared into a region where letters, sent or received, were scarcely a possibility.

Believing, no doubt, that his children were swiftly disappearing beyond the sound of his voice, he taught and admonished them with desperation, filling the pages with injunctions because he had no other way of expressing his love and nothing else to give. He would never have any money to leave them, so they would have to earn their living, he told them gravely, even though the eldest among them was not yet seven. Their employment for the moment, he reminded them, was their studies, and they must work hard. They must be kind to their mother and little Zouga and not quarrel, for they would never find any in the world who would love them as they loved each other. They must be as brave as Mr Oswell, and never be ashamed to say that they loved Jesus. They were, he declared, more Jesus's children than his own. He loved them all very much, but he must go away to tell sinners what they had never heard before.

He wrote again when he reached Linyanti in June to delight them with the news that the Bakololo called him "*Ra-Robert*" and "*Ra-Nannee*" and that there was a little "Thomas" in the town. Very soon, he said, and for a long time, he would have no way of writing, but would pray for them, and that would surely bring down a blessing "by a shorter route" than any other.



## Chapter Ten

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### The Aftermath and the Legacy

*In 1933 a tall elderly gentleman appeared in the offices of the London Missionary Society with an old-fashioned daguerreotype of a friend from his school days at Kendal. The boy in the picture was Robert, the eldest son of David Livingstone and the only child whose name was consistently omitted in the flood of eulogies after his father's death.*

*In the photograph the lad's school tie is carefully knotted, his hair combed and parted. The broad forehead and stern brow are those of his father, but finer; the dark, penetrating eyes, those of his mother. The face is moulded with gentleness, but no calm. The troubled eyes are averted, the hand tense. By some chance or the inevitable the photographer captured all the turmoil and vulnerability of a tragic youth who grew to the edge manhood but did not live long after his portrait was made.*

By the time Mary received her husband's letter recounting the destruction of their home at Kolobeng the empty shell of the house might have stood for all the homelessness she had learned to endure.

Her removal to Britain had begun well enough. The children were delighted with everything, as they had been in Cape Town. There was the bustle of dockyards and big cities and then the first train any of them—even she—had ever seen. From its windows they watched the magic-lantern images rushing past as they steamed their way to Scotland. The lush meadows and copses, wisteria-decked villages and green hedgerows were a startling contrast to the sackcloth buff of the Kalahari.

Snow and frost came to dress the landscape for Christmas, but Mary and the children found it hard to bear the cold. Livingstone had predicted that they would not easily stand it. Winter in Hamilton, where they stayed in a cottage near his parents and sisters, proved less than magical. It was a season of grey tedium and gloom, of dour, house-bound Scots inhabiting cramped, fusty cottages where Mary's accent sounded foreign to their ears. She and the children, raised in the open veld, took sick, and only the youngsters, more resilient than she, made a reasonable recovery. She was unwell all that long winter, with the torment of her paralysis recurring with illness and the cold and damp.

Pain and dreariness may have made her disagreeable. Disorientation and the inability to fit in hindered her at every turn, as the stairs in Cape Town had hindered David. His parents undoubtedly expected more of a daughter of the renowned Reverend Moffat than a woman who was silent, self-contained and possessive of her children. Early on in the acquaintance they quarrelled, and she moved away leaving no address.

When the devastating news of Kolobeng arrived to add to her distress, she had already tried to settle in Hackney, and, when that failed, moved on to



Manchester. She was in debt, as she had been since the beginning. The Society allowed her £30 a quarter, but nothing for rail fares and customs duties, setting up house or buying winter clothing. She had already got through her first quarter's allowance in a month, and had required an advance on the next.

Accustomed as she was to a servant and paying in beads, it is hardly surprising that she sent her laundry out and found the bill beyond her means. On the edge of the Kalahari she had managed by bartering, making clothes and relying on David to write orders to Kuruman and England. Now she found her abilities grossly inadequate in making purchases and handling money. She was positively beguiled by what she saw in shop windows. Once she bought things for David without thinking whether she had any way of sending them, and neglected to reserve money for necessities.

She fell into the habit of asking for an advance on her stipend, with no idea of how she would live when it was gone. Admitting "indiscretions" in budgeting, she claimed that she had been misled by acquaintances who gave her advice. Her brief, hesitant letters to the Reverend Tidman, written with a Setswana turn of phrase that reflected her alienation, evolved into abject pleas. She was "out of money" and had "no one else to look to".

If you do not think it proper to give any of my allowance, will you kindly let me have fifteen pounds of Mr Livingstone's salary. I shall acquaint him of it, and make it up...<sup>178</sup>

But the Society remained as grudging as ever.

Mary had come "home" to an alien land. Like so many Europeans in Africa, her parents had unwisely or unavoidably let their offspring put down roots while they instilled the belief that they could always make a home in the nation of their forebears. Mary's sister Helen had settled happily enough in Kent, but she had a wealthy husband. Mary was alone, and isolated by privation.

Mary and Helen apparently did not get on, as Mary did not contact her sister. She visited several of her parents' friends, who were Nonconformists like her parents and herself, but even in religion she was an outsider. Raised on remote stations in the mission field, imbued with the zeal of her parents' creed, she had not been prepared for the scepticism and doctrinal controversy, including Darwinism, that confronted her in ordinary conversation. Her parents' simple convictions and strength in the face of heathenism, hardship, danger and untimely death were reduced to confusion in a few months, and her armour of faith began to fall away, leaving her defenceless.

Four-year-old Tom had a debilitating bladder complaint that may have come from infected water in Ngamiland. It worried Mary, as did the poor eyesight Agnes suffered, that may have resulted from bouts of conjunctivitis at Kolobeng<sup>179</sup>. Looking after the infant Oswell would normally have demanded all her remaining time, but Robert had become the most difficult of all. Starting school in Hamilton, he had disliked it immediately and become troublesome. When she moved to Hackney he became worse, refusing to co-operate in even the most minimal way. He exploded into tantrums at an age when he should have outgrown them. The toddler who had refused to relate to anyone but the chief and his father's helpers was more obstinate than ever, and his mother could not manage him.



Loss of father, home and country appears to have been too much for the unstable boy.

To make matters worse, Mary received no word from her husband in the entire year of his absence, and became deeply distressed. The seeds of her despair had been sown earlier in her expectation of a two-year separation. Two years had nearly gone, and she learned that he had got only as far as the Bakololo. She understood little of his delays, or that he had been prostrate with fever nine times when he had seemed to be immune to it.

When he recovered, the new Kololo chief, Sekeletu, young and uncertain, refused to let Livingstone proceed on his way. He was obliged to pass the time, month after month, preaching on the banks of the Chobe while he became increasingly anxious over the passage of time and appalled by the degradation of the people. He would preach, and find his "congregation" drifting away to get drunk. Debauchery was a way of life for them. Their ordinary conversation was a string of insults and obscenities. His only escape was a brief excursion to the edge of the Zambezi valley, where he searched but could not find a malaria-free site for permanent work. The plan for a mission was deferred one last time and would never be fulfilled.

Finally he received the chief's permission to make his departure, and sent his cattle boys and driver back to Kuruman; wagon travel was no longer feasible. He would go on foot and on his riding ox, Sinbad, and progress would be slow. Maps and descriptions of the country were almost non-existent. Twenty-seven Zambezi Bakololo would carry his goods, but the supplies and equipment were meagre for what lay ahead. In the face of unknown peril, he asked a blessing on his wife and bequeathed his most precious possessions to his children. If he were "cut off" and his belongings recovered, he wrote in the fine, clear hand he saved for his journal, his watch was to go to Agnes, his sextant to Robert, his Paris Medal for discovery of the Lake to Thomas and his double-barrelled gun to "Zouga".

He set forth, and immediately the missionary husband and father yielded to the explorer. The anaesthetic of strenuous activity and providentialism flowed in his veins and dulled concern for danger, isolation and the heedlessness of the African people. Simultaneously it blurred his concern for the welfare of his family and his ability to imagine their difficulties. He described the phenomenon himself: whenever he was on the move his heart became "cold and dead". The solitary traveller for God was engrossed in his work.

In desperation Mary wrote to the Society directors imploring them to allow her funds to return to Africa, but the men who were finding her dependency increasingly troublesome chose to remain silent. In her bewilderment she packed her things to move again and live with acquaintances, and the Society made no effort to forward her allowance. As her second winter came on she arrived in Kendal penniless and on the verge of a breakdown.

It was there with the Braithwaite family, Quaker friends of her parents, that Mary was most cared for and understood. They took her and the children into the refuge of their home and nursed her through a month-long illness, calling their own doctor when she had no money, and paying for his care. They put the two



eldest children into their Quaker School, where Robert was patiently described as "high spirited" and in need of "drawing out", and where—for the first time—he became more stable and responsive.

The winter passed and Mary improved, yet something drove her away again, this time to Epsom, while she left Robert and Agnes with the Braithwaites so that they could remain in school. She may have wished not to be a burden. More likely she was a compulsive, self-reliant wanderer in the absence of her husband, the only person on whom she allowed herself to be dependent. The same odd behaviour had appeared in 1849, when she had left the sanctuary of Kuruman to wait for David's return to Kolobeng, and in both instances she had placed herself and the children in jeopardy. He was her anchor, without whom she had a tendency to drift, even founder.

Again she tried to gain passage to the Cape, under the misguided assumption that he would be there to meet her. Then she learned that he had reached the Portuguese settlement of St Paul de Loanda a few months earlier, at the end of May, 1854, and instead of taking ship for home had turned back in an attempt to reach the opposite coast!

The expedition to the coast, to the city that is now called Luanda, capital of Angola, had been the most arduous he had ever undertaken and the hardest he would ever attempt. Early in the journey most of his medicines had been lost. Stricken with fever, he had fallen from his ox and landed heavily on his head; in another instance, he had been thrown from the ox's back into a river. He had been soaked for weeks on end in swampland and the pouring rain, borne down again and again by malaria and plagued with the throat condition from which he had enjoyed some respite in the dry highveld.

Besides illness and exhaustion he had faced continual isolation, without even books; the few he might have brought with him had been destroyed at Kolobeng. He carried almost no provisions, and lived by the charity of chiefs who sometimes gave food, but more often demanded levy for onward passage: an ox, a gun or a man, payments he could not or would not relinquish. He had only the ivory that Sekeletu had provided and his ability to gain their confidence.

Arriving at Luanda half a year after his departure from Linyanti he had been in a state of extreme debilitation. Her Majesty's Commissioner, Edmund Gabriel, had taken him into the charity and comfort of his home without expecting his undernourished and fever-ridden visitor to rally. So ill was he, the inveterate correspondent, that he lay for weeks unable to lift a pen. Finally he began to recover and to enjoy companionship and the accoutrements of civilisation, but he had received no letters. It was the cruellest disappointment of his journey. His friends, he presumed, had not believed that he would reach the Atlantic coast. Mary had written, he presumed, but her letters had gone astray. The possibility exists, of course, that Mary had not written at all. Her symptoms were those of a depressive: inability to organise her resources and time, to relate to others or accomplish even the simplest tasks. Livingstone delayed his stay at Luanda for weeks beyond his recovery, hoping each day that some mail would reach him, and none did.





*Robert Livingstone, aged about fifteen*



Having found no feasible route for wagons, his thoughts turned again on the possibility of the vast Zambezi becoming the artery to the interior from the opposite coast. In mid-September he departed to retrace his steps to Linyanti and on to the Indian Ocean. An Austrian botanist offered to accompany him, but Livingstone declined, thinking, as he put it, that the man might avail himself of "all my previous labours ... without acknowledging his obligations to me in Europe". In that simple remark lay a full explanation of his preference for travelling alone<sup>180</sup>.

The return took a full year. He was attacked again by malaria, then by rheumatic fever, and was further delayed by an unusual circumstance. As he marched away from Luanda he received a message from Commissioner Gabriel that all the journals, maps, letters and dispatches he had forwarded from Luanda to England had gone down with the mail-packet "Forerunner". Livingstone had once more to deliberate on God's mercy, for he had considered embarking himself on the same ship, from which only one person had survived. He also had to think about his lost papers, records for a journey that would attract great interest. He settled down to copy everything that had been lost before it escaped memory.

To Mary, as he approached Linyanti, he wrote an apology and explanation for all that had detained him, except the primary cause of delay: his decision to repeat his exploit in the opposite direction. On his arrival among the Bakololo, there was rejoicing. He gathered the people for a service of thanksgiving, only to be reminded of how barbarian they were.

By November, 1855, he was on his way east with more men, cattle, riding oxen and provisions than Sekeletu had given him previously, and with the Paramount Chief's right of levy to obtain food when he needed it. Travel was easier at first. He reached the awe-inspiring falls that he had heard described hundreds of miles away. *Mosi-wa-tunya*—"The Thundering Smoke"—was a spectacular 1,800 yard (1,640m) wide cascade of water that fell 320 feet (96m) into a gorge and returned clouds of vapour high into crystal rainbows. He named the marvel Victoria Falls in honour of his sovereign, with ample appreciation no doubt for the sensation his discovery would create at home.

Soon he encountered a succession of perilous situations with hostile chiefs. On the banks of the Luangua River, he and his men were suddenly surrounded by armed warriors. Their stealth had been extraordinary. Their women and children were not present: the possibility of massacre was obvious. He could do nothing but keep the belligerents absorbed with his magnifying glass while the bulk of his men slipped away. Gradually the taut spring of disaster unwound, and he was able to move on, joining his men. His journal during the period is a chronicle of hazards and frequent repetition of Christian commitment.

Finally, in May 1856, four years after his departure from the Cape of Good Hope, he passed through Tete and arrived in Quelimane. There was a letter waiting from the LMS expressing the usual disdain for his exploits, and stating that the directors would no longer support endeavours only "remotely connected" with the spread of the Gospel.

It hardly mattered now. News of his achievements had reached Europe and America. Thomas Maclear at the Cape had received his astronomical



observations and found them astonishingly accurate. Reducing them and preparing abstracts, he sent them to the Royal Geographical Society in London, where the President, Sir Roderick Murchison, presented them to the body along with Livingstone's dispatches. The gentlemen were amazed, not only by the missionary's accomplishments, but by what his first biographer would call "the simplicity of his arrangements". No one had ever travelled so ill-equipped and badly provisioned, so entirely reliant on his intelligence and ingenuity and the loyalty of a few unschooled Africans.

Approaching Quelimane through Portuguese territory Livingstone had seen the scourge of slavery everywhere and wrote now to describe it. The good work of Jesuit priests had been reduced to nothing by the blight, he said. Portuguese administrators bought slaves and concubines and lived like the prosperous heathen chiefs they purported to control, and consequently sank to their level. What he had accomplished, if he had accomplished anything, was to make a beginning. The geographical feat, he would say when he had the least opportunity to influence, was the starting point to end traffic in human souls. Deliberating on his years at Kolobeng, he justified his failures then as the divinely-ordained force that had driven him here.

Putting to sea at last, he sailed in the brig "Frolic" from Quelimane through the Red Sea and arrived in England on 9 December, 1856. Mary went to Southampton to meet him, but by an error in arrangements he had disembarked at Dover. They met in London, where she presented to him the poem she had written with "A hundred thousand welcomes":

Oh, long as we were parted, ever since you went away,  
I never passed an easy night or knew an easy day.

Do you think I would reproach you with the sorrows that I bore?  
Since the sorrow is all over now I have you here once more...<sup>181</sup>

She did not in any way reproach him; her trials and hardships were over. She looked forward to their settling down with the children all round them, but hardly expected a life of their own. The newspapers caught hold of him, their most important newsmaker. Her husband was the man who had disappeared into the African bush and reappeared after sixteen years, reached the west coast, found the achievement insufficient, and blazed a trail to the east. He was the man who had drawn a new image of the "Dark Continent" when everyone thought it was desert—the obscure Scots missionary of the epoch-making journey. He was a national hero, the man of the hour.

He attended an audience with the Queen. He was called to interviews with Lords Palmerston and Clarendon, the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary, and feted at dinners and presentations. She who had been unbalanced and broken became once more the good quiet wife, watching silently from the gallery as her husband received the Gold Medal of the Royal Geographical Society. She listened as he was praised for the accuracy of his lunar observations, his mapping of the Zambezi, his contributions to zoology, paleontology, botany and geology and commended for his ideals—opening the continent to aid and enlighten the African and to provide a means for the defeat of the slave trade.



Nor was she forgotten. Lord Shaftesbury applauded her. Professor Owen, Livingstone's old tutor, credited her with active support in Africa and endurance in England, though he knew little about either. Steele and Oswell testified to her years of hospitality in the wilderness, about which they knew a great deal; and Livingstone proclaimed before huge audiences that she had been "the main spoke in the wheel".

She was gratified, but did not really wish to be noticed. Her lack of social grace—one might say, refinement—eroded her confidence. Then there was the problem of her appearance. In an era of corsetted waists and delicate complexions, she was bulky, dark and heavy-featured. She wore all the wrong clothes. Fashionable women wore silk and crinolines; she appeared in a dress of "stout lindsey". Others wore gowns with beguiling necklines; she covered herself in layer upon layer. The straw sunbonnet she wore to a public exhibition did not pass without comment. Ladies of the upper classes whispered that she looked more than anything like a middle-aged housekeeper!

With little thought for public expectation at least in regard to her appearance, she concerned herself with the family. They settled into a house in Hadley Green in north London, and the marriage seemed to return to its strong bond of good humour and companionship. The children, who had not known their father for five years, got to know him all over again. He became the devoted parent, taking them for walks in Barnet Wood and showing his pride in all of them when he was in the company of wealthy acquaintances.

Financial difficulties persisted, however, despite his fame. The Society played its well-worn role by agreeing to a grant for his settling-in expenses, and then not relinquishing it. He turned to the publisher, John Murray, for an advance on publication of his account of his early years and expedition; then, when he found that he did not like "eating" his book "before it was made", got down to the writing he had long intended to do. There were still the lectures and speeches he felt called upon to make; and he must not be long away from Africa. His bearers, he said, were waiting for him at Tete.

The children were all around him, playing underfoot and within earshot in that spring of 1857 when he wrote his book, but neither he nor they found any inconvenience in the arrangement. He was as capable as ever of achieving the unusual mental detachment that cut him off from all manner of confusion, and the children enjoyed his company even without his attention. The ones who remembered him at all in later years invariably remarked that he was always engaged in some sort of writing.

While Mary managed his personal correspondence in order to free him, he worked at an incredible pace, producing a manuscript of 1,000 handwritten pages in six months. *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa* came out in November of the same year. The first edition of 12,000 copies at a guinea each was oversubscribed before its printing; and further editions would follow, one after another, a direct reflection of the author's eminence. For Livingstone the book's success was nothing compared with the freedom it provided him from the eternal struggle to make ends meet. He felt the satisfaction of knowing, at last, that he could provide for Mary and his widowed mother and guarantee his children an education.



His interlude with the family passed, and he was forced onto the lecture circuit, travelling to Manchester, Glasgow, Hamilton, Oxford and Cambridge. He spoke on various topics, but most often he preached his new gospel of "Christianity through Commerce". If the African people could be taught and helped to sell the resources of their land and labour, they would resist selling their own kind. Everywhere, there were rapt audiences. The groping hesitations in his speech, his taciturn, humble manner, his vaguely foreign appearance and rural idiom intrigued his listeners. His notions were inspiring. His quiet zeal was compelling. At Cambridge, he electrified his audience with a challenge to carry on the work he had begun. "I know that in a few years I shall be cut off in that country, which is now open; do not let it be shut again!"<sup>182</sup> The failed evangelist inspired a reassessment of the missionary's role. The harsh critic of the Kuruman traders persuaded millions that a continent septic with slavery could be cured with an application of honest trade.

Britons believed. They made an immediate gesture of their confidence through public donations to replace his library at Kolobeng. They conferred upon him the honorary degree of LLD; and they did more. They formed an Anglican "Universities Mission" for central Africa from Cambridge, Oxford, Dublin and Durham, to be led by a bishop and steered by Livingstone himself. The tumult of fervour grew.

In the wake of floundering negotiations to extricate himself from the meagre stewardship of the LMS, he was pleased to secure an appointment as Her Majesty's Consul at Quelimane that provided a generous stipend and £5,000 in provisions for his return to Africa. There would be a river-going steam launch that he would name "*Ma-Robert*" after his wife, a Navy escort to accompany him on the first phase of the new exploration and a generous complement of personnel at his disposal. Thus the great, ill-starred Zambezi Expedition was mounted, and the minister who had never worn his clerical collar could rarely be seen without his gold-banded consular cap.

He had decided that, in view of Mary's past difficulties, she must come with him, leaving the three older children to their studies. She could be useful in sickness and offset his own shortcomings in dealing with European staff. He took the decision despite the implications of Mary's recent pregnancy. Though it had ended in miscarriage, there was a clear sign of what lay ahead—and he ignored it. By mid-March, 1858, she and six-year-old Oswald were aboard the screw steamer "*Pearl*" as the expedition party rounded the West Coast of Africa. Occupied with all the details of staff responsibilities, Livingstone did not immediately realise that Mary's "seasickness" had not abated because she was pregnant again. Then, as if the situation had been entirely beyond the realm of possibility, he declared it "a great trial", and set to work making alterations in his plans.

The jolt to Mary's fragile optimism was far greater than his own dismay. She had escaped her loneliness to take up her old part as helpmate only to be reminded that the role was combined with perpetual childbearing. The very circumstance that had led to their separation had recurred, and now she was to be sent away again. At the Cape she would disembark and go with her brother John to Kuruman, where she would be delivered while David proceeded to the



Zambezi mouth. Once the decision was made, nevertheless, the predicament seemed to lessen. Livingstone was no longer annoyed, and made an effort to console her with a scheme for their reunion. After the birth, he said, as if proposing an outing to the seaside, she could take the child and Oswell and follow the old wagon route through the Kalahari to meet him on the Zambezi.

At his departure alone at Simon's Bay, however, Livingstone felt terribly saddened. He had been bereft at the loss of his family on the same quay six years earlier. Now it was he who waved from the rail of the steamer and she who was standing below. He felt the distress of a man who had helped in all her previous labours, bringing each child into the world. For this child and labour he had only his blessing to offer. There were times when the immensity of the sacrifice overwhelmed him and forced his thoughts back to a simpler, easier time that had never really existed. "If I were to begin again as a missionary," he wrote to her brother, "I should most certainly choose to be alone with my wife"<sup>183</sup>. The child would be born in November, 1858, and Livingstone would not know whether it was a boy or girl, alive or stillborn, or even if his wife had survived until a year afterwards, when Mary returned with young Oswell and the baby, Anna Mary, to Scotland.

In Britain again with her children, Mary heard rumours of bad relations on the Zambezi Expedition, and almost certainly counted herself fortunate to be spared any involvement. But her scarcely improved circumstances again created problems. She was alone again, in the fifteenth year of their marriage, and she had one more child to raise. She had more money, but it slipped through her fingers as quickly as ever. She had never learned to keep accounts or live on a budget. Her skills in making do in the wilderness had long since become obsolete and submerged beneath the complicated activities and tastes of English life.

She developed a sense of neglect and resentment, though she is known to have directed it on only one occasion at David himself, when she wrote in her mother's idiom that she did not "think it duty" for him to leave her year after year. Mostly it was an estrangement from missionaries and the mission cause that was evident in her. She sometimes lost control in company, flinging biting accusations and making a spectacle of herself. She neither sought nor received any help for her emotional problems. No practitioner of the day, in any case, was likely to have diagnosed and treated clinical depression.

At some point alcohol became both solace and provocation for the hapless Mary. Her behaviour in public drew comment, and she was devastated by a clergyman's careless remark that her husband's absences surely indicated that he could not live with her. Livingstone became aware of her mental state through letters from friends, and took to referring to her with affection and pity as his "worse half". For him self-discipline and faith had provided adequate solutions in every dilemma, so he wrote her letters of reassurance and religious inspiration. Disappointing reports continued to reach him, however, and eventually he confided in a letter to Agnes, who was thirteen by then, that he might have to send for "Mamma".



Mary had no choice but to lean on others, and they included the earnest young James Stewart whom she had engaged as a tutor for Tom because the boy had never been strong enough to attend school. Stewart was grave and devout, the son of a founder of the Free Church of Scotland. Early on he had become enamoured with the legend that had grown up around her husband. Now, with a degree in theology and medical training, he hoped to join Livingstone, and with his help establish a mission of his own on the Zambezi. Devotion to Livingstone's wife and son had become a natural expression of devotion to his idol.

Livingstone had found a huge lake called Nyasa, and was absorbed in gaining access to it via the River Shire. For this purpose he had sent the expedition's engineer Charles Rae back to Scotland to hasten the completion of a steamer to replace the "*Mma-Robert*", which was faulty and worn out, as well as another that could be carried in sections past the rapids on the Shire to the lake. Rae arrived in Scotland and visited Livingstone's family. Then, more in the manner of a troublemaker than a confidant, he wrote to Livingstone about his son Robert's deplorable behaviour.

Rae also met Stewart, and took an immediate dislike to him, founded on his suspicion that he aspired to Livingstone's favour. From that point onward the tall, handsome Stewart, Mary's junior by ten years but often in her company, provided a subject of talk among the curious and eventually of malicious gossip. The lonely woman, enduring life in England as best she could, had not anticipated the price she would pay for his company. She had plenty of the rugged good sense needed for physical survival, but too little of the subtler variety required to survive in Victorian society.

Robert, meanwhile, had come to the end of his happy career in the Quaker School at Kendal, and had begun a medical course at Glasgow, following his father's prescription for his education, but the results were disastrous. Suddenly the gentle methods of the Quakers were replaced with harsh tactics, and the boy again became nervous and unpredictable. He quarrelled with his tutor, and though only fifteen, disappeared into the back streets of the city, where Mary searched for a full week before she found him—in his father's hometown of Hamilton. He was deeply ashamed of the trouble he had caused her.

Livingstone, who had put his best efforts into shoring up his wife's resolve in letters, now found that he must deal with his son's rebellion, likewise at great distance. He had little detail to go on: Mary had found the problem "too painful" to describe. His method had always been to counsel and dictate: "Work hard at whatever you do.... Choose some walk in life with a distinct reference to God's glory among men"<sup>184</sup>. Now, in desperation, he resorted to condemning the boy's "vagabond ways" and his drunkenness. Above all Robert had wanted his father's approval, but had always fallen short of achieving it. Approaching adulthood he was unprepared to support the burden of his father's name and the inescapable comparison that would be drawn between the two of them.

Livingstone had been examining the possibility that the River Rovuma could provide access to Lake Nyasa. Now he was forced to contemplate the distress of his family if he took three additional years to explore its course and the feasibility of navigation. At this point he received a letter that forced him to a



decision. Written by an interested supporter and benefactor to the expedition, the philanthropist Angela Burdett-Coutts, it admonished him firmly, and told him he must think again in his neglect of Mary. Responding immediately, he wrote to Mary telling her to book passage to the Zambezi at her earliest opportunity.

He reminded himself that she would be a most valuable assistant in the difficulties that had just arisen. He was advising another party, the Universities Mission led by Charles Mackenzie, recently consecrated Bishop of Central Africa. The otherwise able and sensible Mackenzie had rashly invited his elderly sister and two female servants to join him, and Mackenzie's aide Henry Burrup had invited his new bride! Livingstone hoped that Mary, so capable in difficult circumstances, would counterbalance the ridiculous assemblage and train them all into useful encumbrances.

Mary's life and personality, however, had evolved beyond the point where going out could offer a solution to her problems. Robert in his medical course in Scotland had deteriorated further in outlook and behaviour, and she did not see how she could leave him. Nor did she know what to do about Anna Mary, her youngest. Livingstone, who had never seen the little girl, encouraged Mary to bring the child, but a strong, unexplained caution prevented her consideration of the plan.

Mary forfeited one opportunity of passage and then another. Livingstone intended that Rae should escort her to the Zambezi on his return, but she delayed so long that he finally took ship without her. She vacillated, saying she distrusted her health and dreaded the seasickness that always affected her so badly. She turned to friends, seeking their advice so often that it appeared that she had no mind of her own. She was "perplexed", she said, and hardly knew what to do.

She finally decided to accept the help of David's sisters in Hamilton in caring for the children who were not in boarding school. Putting aside her dread of the voyage, she embarked on the Royal Mail "Celt" in July of 1861 with Stewart, who had delayed his departure to assist her. The passage, after all, was surprisingly enjoyable. Stewart was attentive and she delighted in his company. When she thought of the children he did his best to distract her. Committed as they both were to Livingstone and Africa, they had a good deal in common and much to discuss.

Inevitably, though, Mary's concern over her children made inroads into her composure. Stewart noted how difficult she could be, that she was often sullen, depressed and inebriated. With these observations, the young minister began to feel a disillusionment that would eventually vent itself on Livingstone.

For Mary, who had lived little more than four years with her family intact, there was persistent, nagging doubt over her decision to leave her children. Certainly, it had been the most difficult decision of her life. In all her years in England and Scotland, Livingstone had grown away from his children while she had grown towards them. Now she had left them when they needed her most to demonstrate her devotion to her husband. Her moods swung erratically, and Stewart was the only one upon whom she could depend.

As they reached the Cape, she heard the first reports of the unfolding disaster of the expedition to the Bakololo and realised that if she had stayed in Africa and



joined that mission party to rendezvous with her husband, she and two of her children would now lie dead with the others on the Zambezi<sup>185</sup>. Her father had discouraged her on that occasion; where was she going now? What would become of her children if she perished? She missed her little Anna Mary, but her greatest anxiety was with "poor misguided Robert" whom she loved all the more for his desperate need of her. She had never doubted that there was "good in him". What he required was a firm, gentle hand that was better than her own, and there was no one to give it.

Delayed in Cape Town in late August, Mary and Stewart spent the time sightseeing through the town she knew so well. She came upon friends from years gone by and they remarked on how well she looked; acquaintances gossiped. In the isolated colonial setting scandal ranked high on the list of diversions. Stewart was the first to become aware of it, and revealed the naivete of his youth by relating it to Mary, who was stricken speechless with humiliation. There was no escape. They had been delayed in waiting for stores and onward passage.

They found themselves in the company of Bishop Mackenzie's sister, her servants and a curate, all going out to join the Universities Mission and all, like Rae, ready to dismiss Stewart out of hand. His assertive, confident talk about his mission, preoccupation with practicalities and conspicuous lack of high church piety made their Anglican temperaments bristle. They even suspected him of being a trader. Whatever he was, they wanted him removed from the expedition staff, and enlisted the help of the Bishop of Cape Town to prevent him from proceeding any further. When Mary realised his plight she intervened, refusing to embark herself unless the rest of the party honoured Stewart's right to proceed. Unfortunately, she would have to repeat the performance when the same situation arose in Port Durban. She had been tenacious in his defence, a trait fostered in her by Africa, but no one recognised it as the individualism of the frontier, and it did her reputation no good.

Nor did grieving over her children improve her prospects for the onward journey. In the seven months required to reach the mouth of the Zambezi from England, her anxiety had increased to the point of occasional hysteria, usually towards the end of the day. Alcohol continued to be a factor, Stewart noted, and she ate so much that she could be described, in the vocabulary of the day, as corpulent. To calm her, Stewart gave laudanum, a fashionable opiate that may have aggravated rather than relieved her symptoms. Passengers remarked on the "queer and disagreeable moods" displayed by the odd, truculent wife of David Livingstone. None but Stewart knew anything of her difficulties, and it was quite beyond his capacity to understand them. Eventually, she offended even him, when she behaved disgracefully at his refusal to lend her any more money.

On the dirty little vessel "Hetty Ellen" embarking from Durban, they were crowded together as never before. Mary had to suffer the snobbish Miss Mackenzie, and was worried about how such an ill-assorted group would manage on the difficult expedition ahead. Her only means of survival remained her ability to withdraw from other people, to pull the shades down as she had between herself and her in-laws in Scotland. Needless to say, disappearing from company did nothing to endear her to anyone, including Stewart.



When they finally reached the Luabo mouth of the Zambezi in late January, 1862, there was no sign of Livingstone. There was anxiety over his whereabouts, then the party had to retreat to the Mozambique coast in a hurricane. They returned to make another attempt at sighting his steamer. Their main strength through this trial came from the captain of HMS "Gorgon", commissioned to suppress slavery on the Zambezi. Finally, on 1 February, they saw the white-painted "Pioneer" steaming toward them. As always in greeting her husband, despite all her trials, Mary felt nothing but joy. It had been nearly four years, but he had not "altered", she said. In his faded frock coat and consular cap, he looked almost dashing. Their shared happiness was like a window looking back on early days. She settled in on the little paddle steamer, jammed with the provisions of a cumbersome, badly planned expedition, and set about giving her husband's cramped cabin a new look. With something of her old talent, Mary tidied up, adorned it and made it a home.

She impressed everyone by turning out at five in the morning to organise tons of cargo on the riverbank, almost all of it the assorted extravagances of the Universities Mission. She accomplished a great deal, and still found time to write to her children. To Tom she said that she had not yet found any curiosities to send him as promised, but they would soon be moving into new country along the Shire River<sup>186</sup>. She was in good spirits, trying to put behind her the agonies of the last months among gossips and fools. Her husband, she realised with gratitude, was aware of her humiliation but did not blame her.

The neglected marriage was rekindled, and glowed as if they were at Kolobeng. He teased her that "Old bodies ought now to be more sober, and not play so much", and she countered that he should always be playful, and not "as grave as some folks"<sup>187</sup>. He wrote to her father that he intended to send her on ahead out of the fever belt if he foresaw any delay, and she joked that she could not be got rid of so easily!

Then there were weeks of hectic activity and a good deal of delay in loading and unloading cargo destined up-river, including the cumbersome iron sections of "The Lady Nyasa". Finally they made a departure and reached the old Portuguese settlement of Shupunga, where they rested while the naval captain escorted the Mackenzie party ladies further on to meet the Bishop and Burrup, who were coming to meet them from the mission that they had established at Magomero in the Highlands.

Within days the women reappeared, prostrate with shock and despair. Mackenzie and Burrup had died of fever, and the women and their escort had steamed along the river past the bishop's grave without even realising the calamity. Mackenzie had been only thirty-seven. The slaves he had freed, his flock and new ministry in Africa had no shepherd, and the aim of a mission at Magomero was in ruins. Livingstone's regard for Mackenzie, which had grown stronger month by month, created now a sense of loss so mixed with vexation that he reacted in anger: their whole combined enterprise would come under critical attack as a result of this disaster, he complained, and he correctly forecast the Foreign Secretary's recall of his own expedition.

Mary went down to the coast with him to bid farewell to the bereaved women as they departed for the Cape, then spent weeks with Livingstone in the steamy



delta with "hordes of mosquitoes" as they awaited repair of the boat<sup>188</sup>. Fever followed her back to Shupunga, where her uncertain health deteriorated rapidly. Anxiety over her children and memories of scandal recurred as the illness came on, and her resistance failed completely. She entered a downward spiral that John Kirk, the expedition's medical officer, recognised as due in part to her mental state. He had been aware of the gossip and had believed it, he said, until he knew Stewart better. Now he watched it take its toll on Mary Livingstone.

She fell into a state of deep despondency, and her condition worsened. She vomited and could keep nothing down, not even quinine. Livingstone and Stewart moved her to a stonebuilt Portuguese house on the riverbank and made a makeshift bed. Five days from the fever's onset she was jaundiced, her hair matted and uncombed against her fevered face. Livingstone cut some of it away to apply a blister, to no avail. She lapsed into a coma and lay for a night and a day until, on 27 April, 1862, without regaining consciousness, she died.

She had waited four years, and then four years again, to be with him, and had died within two months. The grave was made at the foot of a baobab tree not far from the abandoned house where she had lain, delirious and crying out in fear for her children.

Livingstone's grief, his unfathomable loss, his regret for what would never be were almost all that remained. With them in the maelstrom of his despair was the anxiety that she had not given herself up to her Maker. Among her papers he found some reassurance, for she had written: "Accept me, Lord, as I am, and make me such as Thou wouldst have me be"<sup>189</sup>. The desolation, however, remained. For the first time he felt "willing to die". Now, as in all the long hours of her dying, he pondered her premonition of death. She had said she would never have a house again in Africa, and he had been blind to her profound intuition.

He poured out his grief to his children, to his friends and the ageing Moffats. Mary Moffat wrote, in response, of her cherished "firstborn", and gave thanks for the gift of knowing that she had died in the presence of her husband. The old woman, despite knowing that her grandchildren had been left alone because Livingstone had brought their mother back to the malarial tropics, allowed herself no hint of reproach, no repetition of the condemnation she had directed at him after the death of the baby years earlier. She praised his accomplishment for Christianity in Africa and accepted its price. As historian Cairns put it, "The missionary movement contained a set of explanations, and muted the impact of failure, disaster, and death"<sup>190</sup>. Finally, in that letter of grief and solace, Mary touched upon her daughter's faith. The voyage of her child's life had been a stormy one, she remarked, but she had not become "a wreck". Mary Moffat either did not know, or did not take into account, the wreckage of her daughter's mental health in England and her loss of confidence and self-esteem in the last months of her life in Africa.

A month later, the fifteen-year-old Agnes had not received her father's tragic news when she sat down to write to her parents. In her bold, neat script, like her bold personality, she wrote about her school prize in music, her holidays and the thrilling prospect of seeing the London Exhibition. Exuberant chatter filled the pages, carrying all the vibrancy of the little girl that woke with a laugh at Kolobeng.



She was still Nannee, growing up with her special brand of courage. She asked if they would settle in Africa, adding wistfully, "I wish I knew ...", then, with a shade of vulnerability, said that she had received no letter in the last post<sup>191</sup>.

Two years later her father came home and allowed her to keep house for him in London. They had always been close, and now it seemed for a brief moment that it might not only be in letters. However, he arranged a finishing school for her in Paris, and went away for the last time. Years later she married a man who was wealthy and influential in support of the missions and Africa<sup>192</sup>. Agnes learned to live with the loss of both mother and father. Her father had never placed such demands on his girl children as he had on his sons.

Anna Mary lived with her old maiden aunts, who gave up their millinery shop to provide a home for the children. She retained no memory of the mother who had torn herself away with so much grief, except that instant when she was held up to wave goodbye and had been distracted by the little red shoes her mother had given her. She met her father for the first time when she was five years old, and remembered years later that he gave her a black doll that she politely pretended to like, and that she had been shy with him and he with her. He had been kind, however, and kissed her and went away, and she never saw him again.

She grew up quite alone. It was not as if she had brothers and a sister, for they were all much older. Agnes had done what she could to keep them all tightly knit, but the aunts made no attempt to draw the children together, and did not speak of her father or of Robert after he disappeared. Nevertheless, Anna Mary eventually understood her father's work, not from his own telling about it but from others, and declared that if that was what he liked to do he must do it!

When she reached adulthood she took up the banner for Africa herself, and was the only one among the children to do so, though her father had dedicated them all to the Lord's service<sup>193</sup>. She alone had not been blighted by Kolobeng because she had never been at Kolobeng. Finally she was able to speak of Africa from personal experience, and talked in the humble, homely speech of the minister of God to the heathen that her father once had been. Her writing showed that she, too, came under the spell of camp life and *ulendo*, the stillness of the trees, contrasting colours and the great vaulted sky that made a sanctuary of the woods where he died<sup>194</sup>.

Robert had gone off the rails completely when his mother died. He drank, kept bad company and seemed to throw away every opportunity that came his way. In calmer, responsible moments, he was as concerned about his future as anyone, and presently he produced an idea. He wanted to join the navy, but the proposal got no further than the board of trustees that his father had appointed to oversee the children's education. They refused to allow Robert to enlist, and though they were acting within the guidelines set down by his father, Livingstone deplored the narrow mindedness of their decision. The navy, Livingstone pointed out, might be the boy's last chance to make something of himself. That "something be made of him" had always been Livingstone's greatest concern.

There had been a period before Mary's death when she and the trustees had appealed to him to allow Robert to come out to Africa. He saw now that the time had come, and there was almost nothing else that could be done. Livingstone



was not without conscience in respect to his responsibilities to his family, as he pointed out to a friend<sup>195</sup>. He arranged for Robert to receive money for his steamer fare, then was exasperated to learn that he had squandered it. It was increasingly clear that the lad must be thrown onto his own resources. Thus he did not offer to replace the money. There had always been those who thought well of Robert, however, and an old friend of his father's provided enough money for him to try again to reach his father.

In June of 1863 Robert arrived at Port Elizabeth, destitute but determined to work his way to Natal, where he could get help from his uncle and namesake Robert. Livingstone had always been so concerned that the boy was turning out a "ne'er-do-weel" that he had undervalued the stubborn independence in him that was like his own. His grandmother Moffat, who still remembered the small boy waving goodbye from the wagon, wrote a moving letter begging him to turn to her for help. When he would not, she felt she understood. No one had discerned his conflicts better than she. After all, her own son Robert had tried and failed to come to terms with his father's example.

Robert Livingstone arrived in Natal to find that his uncle had died, leaving a young widow who tried to help him but could do very little. He went on his way to reach the mouth of the Zambezi, where he hoped he could find or trace his father. It was an impossible journey. He had no money or friends, no knowledge of the coastal area. He encountered a man who knew his father but refused to help him because he thought he had run away. Livingstone heard that he had reached the coast and made an effort of sorts to assist him. He wrote to various people asking them to lend a hand if they saw the boy, but none did. Some time later, Robert was seen in Cape Town living in the sailors' home where, according to a scornful associate of his father, he was "up to no good". Robert made few contacts, no one contacted him, and presently he was gone.

Nothing more was heard of him for a year, when Livingstone learned that he had worked his way to Boston and fallen into great trouble. He had been "shanghaied" and forced to fight for the Union Army in the war that had erupted between the northern and southern states. In fear for his son's life, Livingstone reacted as always with blunt anger: "That bad boy," he said, "will be made manure of for those bloody fields"<sup>196</sup>.

He could hardly have anticipated the frank, courteous letter he received in October of 1864 when he returned to England. The thoughts were surprisingly balanced and mature for a troubled boy of seventeen, and there was no shred of self-pity in desperate circumstances:

My dear Sir,

Hearing that you have returned to England I undertake to address a few lines to you, not with any hope that you will be interested in me but simply to explain the position...

From Port Natal I went to Cape Town where your agent Mr Rutherford advised me to find employment on board a brig that brought me to Boston, America. Here I was kidnapped and one morning, after going to bed on board ship, I found myself enlisted in the US army.



I have been in one battle and two skirmishes, and expect to be in another terrific battle before long. God in His mercy has spared me as yet. I have never hurt anyone knowingly in battle, have always fired high, and in that furious madness which accompanies a bayonet charge and which seems to possess every soldier I controlled my passion and took the man who surrendered prisoner.

The rebels are not likely to hold out much longer as we have nearly all their railroads. My craving for travelling is not yet satisfied, though if I had the chance that I threw away of being educated, I should think myself only too much blessed. I have changed my name, for I am convinced that to bear your name here would lead to further dishonour to it. I am at present in this hospital, exposure and fatigue having given me ague fever.<sup>197</sup>

The letter was signed Rupert Vincent, New Hampshire Volunteers, 10th Army Corps, Virginia, but the handwriting was unmistakably his son's.

Livingstone learned more from his daughter Agnes. Robert had always written to his sister when he had avoided everyone else. He had told her that he and his comrades had nothing to eat but raw pork. Dysentery was rife among the wounded, and there were hardly any medicines in the hospital. Nevertheless he blamed himself for his appalling situation: he had been terribly wrong, and could now see quite clearly that he always made some awful mistake "before going through any business". Yet he had hope. There was a chance, he suggested, that he might be released from service for "£60 or so", and he would resist any temptation to desert, as so many were doing, as long as he had hope of an honourable discharge<sup>198</sup>.

Livingstone appealed to the American Consul in England and to his friend Sir Roderick Murchison to use their influence to intervene in Robert's case, having always relied on others where his children were concerned. He waited, concentrated on his writing of a narrative of the expedition, and consoled himself that the boy was tough and wiry and could stand hunger. He was grasping at straws. He knew that danger or disease, not hunger, would kill Robert. There was little he could do, and it was far too late. It had always been too late, and he had always been somewhere else. Robert went back into action and was captured at Laurel Hill in Virginia. He lay for six weeks in a hospital for prisoners of war in Salisbury, North Carolina, and died of his wounds on 5 December 1864. He was not yet nineteen.

For years Livingstone was silent about Robert, mourning him even when he had no confirmation of his death. Only in the last three years of his life, when Stanley of the *New York Herald* reached him far in the interior at Ujiji, did Livingstone know with certainty his son's fate. He tried then to make one final, futile gesture toward the boy he had so neglected. He charged Stanley on his return to America to arrange for the removal of Robert's body to the National Cemetery at Gettysburg. The task was never accomplished, and never could be. Robert had been buried in a mass grave.

In his final years Livingstone took comfort in the delusion that his son's body lay at Gettysburg "among brave men who fought and died in a noble cause"<sup>199</sup>.



This germ of justification for a wasted life was further developed by the myth makers in awe of Livingstone. When Robert's portrait was rediscovered by chance, in 1933, a Livingstone admirer attempted to make him a son worthy of his father's accomplishments. Robert Livingstone had been anything but a black sheep, he proclaimed. He had died in his father's own cause of abolition! But the facts are clear. Robert did not join willingly: he was press-ganged. He did not fight; he fired high, and he hoped that his father would buy his release for just £60. He had wanted nothing more than a bond between himself and his father. He was no martyr to anything but his father's name.

Livingstone, who had provided so much focus and force to the anti-slavery movement, experienced defeat and disillusionment in his final years. He saw, to his horror, that all the paths he had taken into central Africa had filled up behind him with slavers and their caravans of wretched humanity. The beautiful River Shire, banked with reeds and plumed papyrus, floated corpses that had to be cleared every morning from the paddles of his steamer "Pioneer". The river valley, devastated by intertribal conflict and slave raids, succumbed to famine, and children sold themselves into slavery for a meal. In the Shire Highlands, where the stockade and rude church of the new mission had stood, there were only Burrup's grave and the desperate remnants of the Manganja, who had bartered more food than they could spare to the missionaries.

As his sense of failure grew sharper a coherent set of aims slipped from his grasp. Radical ideas for the salvation and betterment of Africa gave way for a time to the old ideals of the conventional missionary, and he dwelt more and more on the past. In 1870 in Manyuema, west of Lake Tanganyika, he wrote:

I often ponder over my missionary career among the *Bakwains* or *Bakwaina*, and, though conscious of many imperfections, not a single pang of regret arises in the view of my conduct, except that I did not feel it to be my duty, while spending all my energy in teaching the heathen, to devote a special portion of my time to play with my children<sup>200</sup>.

With the wisdom of hindsight he cautioned Oswell, "I hope you are playing with your children instead of being bothered by idiots". The advice was hardly necessary<sup>201</sup>. Oswell had become the affectionate, abiding father of a houseful of children, and the contrast between the two men could not have been greater.

Eventually, when the last journals of his explorer-friend came into his hands, Oswell noticed how quiet Livingstone had become and how gentleness "diffused through all he did"<sup>202</sup>. In the years after Mary died and Robert disappeared, as if in recognition of his culpability, Livingstone showed a greater sympathy towards his remaining children. He never stopped worrying that the guardians he had appointed for them might shirk their responsibility.

He wrote often to Thomas, and the pages were filled with kindness. The affable Tom, frank and open and without any of the obstinacy of his father or Robert, had weathered the demand for strength so peculiar to the Scots and braved his father's annoyance when it was necessary that he be taken out of school. The boy called "*Tau*" (lion) at Kolobeng, never grew to be robust. When Livingstone returned to England he found a tall, delicate boy who did not recognise him. Then, back in Africa, he waited anxiously to hear that his



fair-haired, even-tempered son had passed his medical examinations at Glasgow. Tom became a doctor, and served in Egypt, but he died when he was only twenty-nine.

Even William Oswell, who had been born in a wagon beneath a camelthorn tree, was far from robust and quite the opposite of the hardy, invulnerable man whose name he bore. The English climate or the absence of his father had done him no good. He was slight of build and intensely reserved, as obstinate as Robert but with less spirit, or so it seemed to Livingstone. In 1872, at the age of 19, Oswell volunteered to join a relief expedition mounted by the Royal Geographical Society when his father had been missing for two years. The party disbanded, however, when the Society received news that journalist H M Stanley had reached the explorer on the shore of Lake Tanganyika. Then Livingstone, whose gentleness was not entirely pervasive, condemned his youngest son for failing to prove himself or do anything that might allow him to "hold up his head"<sup>203</sup>. Young Oswell returned home. Like Thomas he persevered in the medical course his father demanded, though he was always short of money. Like Thomas he did not live long, and his widow was left badly off.

The flamboyant Stanley may have resembled more closely Livingstone's ideal for a son. He stayed with Livingstone on the lakeshore at Ujiji through the final months of 1871 and early 1872, and the frail, lonely man enjoyed his company as the first person of his race that he had seen in seven years. The companionship and conversation of the young adventurer filled a great void for the old man who, by his own admission, was toothless and in his "second childhood"—not yet sixty but aged beyond his years, worn out and dying.

He was unable to go home, unable to retire. The Unseen Hand rested so heavily that martyrdom was almost essential; or in practical terms it might be said that he was aware of his effect on a whole generation, and wished not to do anything to diminish it. All things tended now towards the end. Even when his precious medicine box was gone he accepted the loss as a possible "blessing in disguise". His remaining purpose, his latter-day obsession, was to locate the source of the Nile. In the swamps of Bangweulu, where he died of exhaustion, he found his consummation of calling and atonement.

For David Livingstone, if there is need for absolution it is to be found in his love for his family, however imperfectly he expressed it. It has been suggested here, and by his modern biographers, that his emotions were limited by an early drive to achieve, while his perceptions, love and compassion remained intact. Any reader of his letters notices the grief he felt at the loss of Elizabeth, who he said had "entwined herself round his heart" in the six short weeks of her life. At Kolobeng, when Thomas and Robert had quarrelled over a toy cart, he had persuaded Robert to share it with his brother, and wrote from a father's heart that Tom smiled through the tears that stood "thick on his cheeks".

His sensitivities were subordinated, nonetheless, surrendered to the broker to purchase sheer determination, and with that he bartered freedom from the mills and a passage across the Kalahari. Thus he bought the first great journey, others followed and he could never go home again. The joy of children, the companionship of a wife, the retreat that a home might have been, were renounced in a so-called "act of self-denial, a poignant illustration of his



dedicated obstinacy without which Africa could not be served"<sup>204</sup>. To that grandiose assessment one must add a qualification: Livingstone did not sacrifice himself; he enacted a personal fulfilment. He sacrificed his family's happiness, cohesion and even their lives.

The real wreckage of Kolobeng was not the books and medicines thrown upon the ground, the empty rooms and broken windows but the dissolution of a family. Livingstone sent his wife and children "home" to free himself and secure their safety in a country that was in no sense a refuge. Then with youth gone and her spirit broken, Mary escaped her lonely exile to regain her marriage, but fell prey to fear—not for herself but for her children. The unhappy Robert reached out to regain his father, and lost his tenuous grasp on life itself.

The tragedy of Kolobeng was the wreckage of a family sacrificed to an ideal bound by its culture and time, the product of a missionary movement that has gone. Secularism has replaced evangelism. Self-realisation has replaced the personal sacrifice that claimed the lives and happiness of so many who, like Mary and her children, lived and served in the field.

Of the Bakwena, something more can be said concerning their history after Kolobeng. Like the family of David Livingstone, they reaped desolation from the years at Kolobeng; yet Sechele had prepared the ground for a nation, and in the end it was a nation that grew. In the wilderness his people gleaned recovery and security, then gathered prosperity and autonomy, and ultimately it was a harvest in full measure for their toil.

Recovery did not come immediately. For a long time hunger and fear gnawed at the refugees who hid themselves in the Dithejwane Hills where Livingstone had seen the hollow-eyed men and wary, heartbroken women. Their stolen children were never returned. 1854 came, and there was hope. Rain fell, and there was an abundance of wild fruit on the land. But the Boers attacked the Balete, driving them into a cave that they filled with brushwood and fired with hurled torches. The maimed and terrified survivors came to Sechele, begging succour he could hardly give his own people. He could do little against the aggressor but hold shut the road that led northwards, restricting passage to a trusted few.

Into this climate of fear rode the kindly and paternal Robert Moffat, who took up his role as missionary statesman to influence Mzilikazi of the Amandebele who, like Sechele, held him in high regard. In the Dithejwane Hills Moffat broke journey, and sat for hours in Sechele's kgotla. His counsellors came before him, one by one, to tell him of their troubles. Then Kgosidintsi spoke, and Moffat was amazed at the eloquence and bitterness of his speech. The old counsellor's voice was filled with anguish.

Were black people to be destroyed because of their colour? Were they no better than *dibatana* (wild animals) because the English had given land to the Boers that was not theirs to give?

Fathers and mothers lie down at night asking, "Where are our children?". And they get up every morning asking, "Where are our sons and daughters?". And because no one answers, they weep.



Have not the English the word of God, and have not the Boers the word of God? Do their teachers teach them with the same book? ... We have been told the English are a wise nation. Ashu! What is wisdom? ... We are told that the English love all men. They give or sell ammunition, horses and guns to the Boers who have red teeth and destroy us...<sup>205</sup>

Moffat should remember, he cried, that Green and Edwards and the people of Bloemfontein all told Sechele that he would find help in Cape Town, but there was none! Then he was told to go home, and he went home and waited, but there was no help. The English and missionaries made his people dependent, and then left them defenceless. Worse still, they had brought the Boers down upon them. The Boers, he believed, were no more than "the Masarwa of the English". Kgosidintsi, remembering his brother's restraint perhaps, ended his tirade, adding simply that he and his people had never doubted that *Moshete*, who came to listen to them now, was the true friend of the Bakwena.

Moffat was shaken. There was no way he could deny the man's allegations. Nor could he, within the limits of his personal doctrine, ease his despair. Sechele had implored him to provide another missionary, but he could not. The Society directors stood firmly against it, and to their reasons he added his own persistent doubt, not about the safety of missionary lives and property, but about Sechele's sincerity. Even after he had been excommunicated Sechele continued preaching, and Moffat refused to condone it. When Sechele justified his actions by saying that he had no missionary, Moffat pointed out that he had a teacher: it was as unseemly for a chief to teach as it would be for Mebalwe to involve himself in Kwenana politics.

Moffat had seen Sechele's church with its sofa at the front for the royal family. There *Mma-Sebele*, in calico dress and brimmed hat, lolled every Sunday, while Sechele preached from the pulpit, the light of fanatical conviction glinting off his spectacles. He read the lesson, delivered the sermon, said the prayers and led the congregation in singing "some old psalm tune greatly mutilated", as Moffat put it. It was an "unholy mixture" of piety and "wicked heathen practices", he thought, when a man preached and prayed but persisted with initiation rites, the *bogadi* and rain rituals. Livingstone had favoured tolerance of custom and a broad intellectual approach, while Moffat insisted that custom be repressed in the name of Christianity<sup>206</sup>. Thus Sechele was denied a missionary after Livingstone, and went his way unbridled and alone.

Then, in 1856, the resourceful Sechele turned to his enemy—Pretorius himself—to ask for a teacher and a builder, and got them both<sup>207</sup>. The Boers, after driving Livingstone and any vestige of racial liberalism out of the Transvaal, had been visited with sufficient misgiving to invite German and Swiss missionaries into their midst. With these missionaries, men of their own ilk, they felt comfortable. Thus Pretorius was in a position to grant Sechele's request and make use of a golden opportunity to drive a wedge between the Bakwena and the London Missionary Society.

In the chief's *motse* all the Bakwena, including *Mma-Sebele*, resisted what they called Sechele's latest insanity, to no avail. Within a year, a Hanoverian minister named Schroeder and a teacher and tradesman arrived from the Evangelical



Lutheran Hermannsburg Mission. Moffat, half expecting a Boer Trojan horse in the form of these Germans, discovered instead three kindly, uncomplicated men with no capacity for connivance. They were equally delighted to find their work already in hand and gratefully accepted Moffat's offer to leave Mebalwe at their disposal.

Sechele was disappointed when he saw that collaboration with the Boers could not goad Moffat into sending him a missionary after all, but he was satisfied for a time, and his people saw better days. Crops grew, and there were years in which rivers flowed even in August. He moved to Makgophana Hill, where he raised a new church and house and built another for his son Sebele who had grown into manhood. He built trenches and traps and walls of loose stone 5 feet (1.5m) high around the town, but the constant influx of refugees spilled over this perimeter. His town was crowded on every side by the *metse* of chiefs who arrived in an unbroken stream to live in the security of his protection. Huts filled the ridges and wooded valleys and spilled down the slopes to the plain, where the grassland was cleared for planting.

The church flourished and overflowed into the *kgotla*, and Sechele encouraged his *predicant* to preach among his allies that had assembled around him. In 1864, however, a crisis occurred because the dedicated Lutherans were suddenly deprived of the support of their home mission and thrown onto their own resources. They struggled bravely to stay and survive by trading, but as they eked out a living and persevered, the Bakwena were disgusted that they should lower themselves to the status of *smouses*.

With this turn of events, Sechele decided that his adversary's preachers had come to the end of their usefulness. With the Transvaal momentarily weakened by internal disputes, and the English re-establishing their presence on the road north, he judged it a good time to bow to the general sentiment that brothers of the Boers could never be trusted. He also calculated that by dispensing with the Germans, the London Missionary Society would fill the gap, and it did. Moffat, on behalf of the Society, decided to try again among the Bakwena, though he had personally given up on Sechele. He had gazed in alarm at the wall of the new brick church that was "emblazoned" with the names of all Sechele's "heathen" forebears, and decided that it was sacrilege and abomination.

When Roger Price arrived among the Bakwena in 1866 with his wife Elizabeth, who was Moffat's youngest daughter, Sechele had moved his burgeoning town to Logageng where he could build in a gap that could be fortified at the base of rocky hills. There Price built his house, a workshop and a school with kiln-fired bricks that can still be seen today a few kilometres southwest of Molepolole among the remnants of Sechele's walls.

The Prices lived and taught among the Bakwena for many years. "Bessie" was an inveterate letter writer, like her mother *Mma-Mary*, and assembled colourful descriptions on paper. Sechele was impulsive and generous, she wrote, but apt to erupt in a blazing temper. He was adept at justifying his behaviour by quoting Scripture, chapter and verse, and if that did not work he would declare simply that "David did it!". His children were every bit as erratic as he, firing off the cannon he had acquired in the progress of grandiose accumulation. But his



people had adopted Christianity, and their patriarch's eagerness to learn, she added, and the names of the Livingstones were spoken frequently among them.

The Kwena *morafe* continued to grow. The die-hard Kgakge and his Kwena stragglers arrived at last, along with the Bahurutshe of Gopane and the Batlokwa and Bakone. The 300 ragged souls who had lived with Sechele at Tshongwane, who had increased to 2,000 with the addition of Bubi's people and 20,000 in the years after Dimawe, now numbered over 30,000. Sechele was forced to remove his town yet again, relocating at Molepolole Hill, where his multitude could spread over the plains in every direction.

There was not only increase, but also evolution. The people became less dependent on hunting and gathering, and much of the old life disappeared. The *gopo* became a thing of the past; Kwena hunters had wagons to carry their guns and cooking pots and their women and children into the Kalahari on hunting expeditions that resembled week-long picnics for the enjoyment of the easy kill. Their guns depleted the fringes of the thirstland until the area was almost empty of animal life.

Through his prestige in wealth, modern weapons, vassals and protected tribes, Sechele became the most powerful *kgosi* among the Batswana, and indulged his taste for political intrigue. His meddling in the affairs of the Bangwato and Bangwaketse to wrest trade from them did not succeed, but a wealth of feathers, ivory and pelts came into his hands, and he prospered<sup>208</sup>. He ordered another house to be built that was larger than the last, with a fireplace and mantel, dining room, drawing room and a guest room. In due course the walls were embellished with velour and the ceiling adorned with a crystal chandelier in imitation of houses he had seen in the Colony. The royal residence was a grand mixture of styles and a confusion of all manner of curiosities—a silver teapot and china cups, decanters, musical boxes and monogrammed guns and swords. Furniture stood everywhere, and clothing and books lay in untidy piles. There were telescopes and wind instruments that can only be explained as the influence of a highly educated missionary on a Mokwena of unusual intellect.

Sechele's tastes in the 1860's were as incomprehensible to his people as they had been twenty years earlier when he had given up the kaross for shirt and trousers. His counsellors never became accustomed to the big brick house near the *kgotla*, and *Mma-Sebele* was so daunted by the task of keeping it clean that she withdrew to her hut. In time Sechele saw that he must forego the standards he held for the house, and it became unoccupied and decidedly unkempt. Everyone was happier then, and he found his people more loyal. Visitors were obliged to take him as they found him, so to speak, and he continued to entertain an enormous number of English and Americans, Griquas, Basotho, Amandebele—and Boers as well—with the courteous, attentive mien of an elder statesman.

After the death of *Mma-Sebele* the aging Sechele became truculent and more resistant to Price's influence. It was said, nevertheless, that he still maintained a deep sense of contrition. Cut off from the church again and again, he had always been reinstated, and lived his final years in full membership. His memory of



Livingstone's desertion persisted, nevertheless, and he begged Price to stay with him until he died.

His authority over his people prevailed in old age, and he governed with firmness and imagination. Years earlier he had seen criminals put to work on the roads of the Colony, so he applied the same punishment to Kwena offenders. More than fifty traders settled on the outskirts of the Kwena capital, and their shanties blotted the landscape like dung heaps, so he put a stop to their brandy drinking and carousing, saying Europeans and Griquas should set a better example for his people. Travellers remarked then that there was more hospitality and Christianity among the Bakwena, and less stealing, than among any of the other Batswana tribes.

Kwena fear of attack gradually receded, and Afrikaner freebooters moved in to live and farm peaceably among Sechele's people, hiring and paying for their labour. These amiable men swelled the ranks of whites who had settled as store-keepers and itinerant traders in the Kweneng. Boer children sat among Kwena children in mud-built schools to learn reading and numbers in Setswana. Sebele and his young companions picked up Afrikaans. Interchange increased and peace was maintained, but Sechele clung to his ideal of a secure and independent *bogosi*.

In 1870 a rush of fortune hunters for gold in the Tati region focused the long-running question of British protection for the Batswana. A British official proposed that labour shortages in the mines at Kimberley be solved by securing the whole of "Bechuanaland" up to the Zambezi under British control. Still there was hesitation. Soldiers were garrisoned at Mafikeng and withdrawn. A new wave of freebooters moved in, worrying the Bakwena, but Sechele and Gaseitsiwe of the Bangwaketse were reluctant to accede to British intervention, firmly convinced that the risk of domination was as great as the benefits of protection. A test of Sechele's resolve occurred in 1874, when the London Missionary Society proposed a seminary at Molepolole. He recognised the move as the fulfilment of Livingstone's long-held dream, but was equally mindful of Kuruman's domination of the Batlhaping, and refused to allocate the land to build it.

Sechele saw, to the north, Khama of the Bangwato and other Tswana *dikgosi* allied for strength under the influence of the missionary-politician, John Mackenzie, who preached British colonialism along with the Bible. The old Mokwena and his son and closest allies then laboured with John Smith Moffat, son of Robert, and Ludorf of the Wesleyans to prevent British control. All he had ever asked of the British, he insisted, was that they stop selling guns to the Afrikaner!

In 1884 Tswana lands were lost to a British protectorate that was declared south of the Molopo. In 1885 General Charles Warren arrived with an expeditionary force of 4,000 to drive out settled Afrikaners and extend British control beyond the Molopo. Sechele and Sebele resisted and then grudgingly accepted the incursion, while they turned all their efforts to preventing full colonial rule. The struggle was far from over. The threat of the Afrikaner had been replaced by the prospect of Tswana lands disappearing under the jurisdiction of the British South Africa Company, as it had when Cecil Rhodes took land from



the Amandebele. In 1885 the lands east of Kuruman were designated for white settlement.

In 1895, three years after Sechele was laid to rest in his kraal in peace and beloved by his people, Sebele took up his father's fight for unity and autonomy. With Khama of the Bangwato and Bathoen of the Bangwaketse—the pan-Batswana alliance created at Dimawe—Sebele embarked for London with the LMS missionary W.C. Willoughby, to petition the Queen, thus achieving the goal denied his father forty years earlier.

At first the Crown refused to block the British South Africa Company's authority over Bechuanaland, but the chiefs appealed to Britons already roused to sympathy by Livingstone and by Sechele's *Cape Mail* condemnation of the Boers that had swayed influential societies in Britain. The company's control over Tswana lands was withdrawn, and the chiefs were assured of protection. Sechele had demonstrated the value of appealing directly to the British public.

The path to a Tswana republic would be long and the establishment of a British protectorate unavoidable. Leadership for the new nation, when it came into being, would fall not to Sechele's heir but Sekgoma's. Sechele's contribution had already been made. Years before, in 1858, when German Lutherans had taught among the Bakwena, Sekgoma had taken refuge with Sechele, and his son had come under the influence of Christianity. The young man, Khama III, had returned to Shoshong to appeal to the LMS for a missionary, and received one before Price arrived among the Bakwena, much to Sechele's chagrin.

Years earlier Sechele had rallied a force of Batswana against the Boers at Dimawe in what would be known as the Batswana-Boer War of 1852. Then he had turned envoy to appeal to the British of the Colony to stop selling guns to the Boers, and when they would not see his logic, he retrenched, closed the road and staged a holding action against Boer aggressors. He had set his boundary with the Transvaal at the Limpopo and Ngotwane rivers, and there it remained for the nation that was to come into being.

The legacy of Sechele started still further in the past, in the crucial years after 1842 when he was first among the Batswana to recognise the English traders, travellers and missionaries as a shield against aggression and a means of accommodating oncoming change. For years he alone studied the Bible and the lifestyle of the European. He alone sent his wives away, risking his chiefship and his life to become a Christian. In that peril he survived to encourage the new ways and new religion, even after Livingstone had forsaken him.

In a career that spanned half a century, Sechele had taken a few hungry and nomadic people, fragmented and harassed by the *difaqane* and the Afrikaner, and built a populous, prosperous and cohesive *morafe*, the greatest among the northern Batswana. The kingdom of *Kgosi* Sechele, in turn, provided an example to the Bangwato and Bangwaketse, whose kingdoms formed in its likeness, and the Tswana chiefs learned strength through co-operation to create the genesis of the modern nation of Botswana.



## Epilogue

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### The Remnants and the Memory

In the Kweneng district of Botswana there is a hill with little soil and much loose rock, clothed with thorns and blown by the relentless wind of the Kalahari. The river plain below the hill is lush with grass and the Kolobeng is flowing, for another cycle of drought has ended and another year begun. The land has a beauty now that is not entirely of peace but of life, and it is difficult to imagine how those who came to settle were driven out.

Nearby, beyond the river, lives an old woman who can attest to the endeavour that took place on the hill and how it all came to an end. Esther Mulunga's face is lined, and her fleshless body demands each year another patched shawl for the desert winter and the winter of her years. Yet she is tall and acute, with a bearing that conveys the pride of mixed lineage (for her father was Malawian) and an education acquired under the British Protectorate. "In those days", she will tell you emphatically, the schools "taught as they should", and Standard One alone was quite enough!

She and the knowledgeable, white-haired Koloi—like confidants in a conspiracy of recollection—sit within the walls of her *lolwapa* joking and gossiping in fluent, precise English and sharing the bond of Kolobeng, for Koloi was born "up there" on the hill. His parents acknowledged his birthplace by naming him Livingstone, and sent him, at the age of nine, to Molepolole, to care for the aged and infirm Baotsiwa Sabata, Esther's great-grandmother, who would never let anyone forget that she had learned her alphabet beside *Mma-Robert's* skirts. Girlhood scenes from old Baotsiwa's memory grew more vivid with her sightlessness in the passing years, and she delighted in telling tales of Kolobeng: fear of being late to school; the stifling dress she had to put on, and tore off as she ran home down the hill; the kindly *Mma-Robert* and her children; and in the end, the terrible battle with the *maburu* and the roar of the guns—"KATU! KATU!"<sup>209</sup>

Longevity runs in Esther's family. Her grandmother lived into her nineties, retelling Baotsiwa's tales and her own from the years when she was nurse girl to the missionaries at Logageng where Sechele rebuilt his town—Roger Price and his wife, Bess, who came from Kuruman and was a sister of Mary Livingstone. Wookey, who came after Price, and Willoughby discouraged the *bogwera* initiation, and oral history almost died with it. The Bakwena live in the present with too little knowledge of Sechele, the missions and their heritage.

The missionaries tried to destroy custom and tribal memory, and the Protectorate that was created in Sechele's last years undermined the authority of the chiefs even while guaranteeing their position in the country's political structure. Yet missionaries and administrators were incredulous when they found they could not make of Kolobeng a memorial valued and protected by the people. Dusty memoranda from the early days of the century record the inspiration and the futility:



Can the Resident Commissioner authorize a meagre sum for a fence and locked gate at the ruins of the great explorer's house? Evangelist Kgabo will keep the key for love and memory—he was a pupil. The remains of walls have been protected with thatch...

The Chief, Sechele's grandson, must see to it that the ground is scoffed around the walls for a firebreak...

The ground was never cleared and swept... Veld fires have destroyed the thatch. Rain has disintegrated the mud bricks. The fence is down. There is no money ...<sup>210</sup>.

Foundation stones alone remain and endure at Kolobeng in defiance of cattle and the elements. The river is flowing; reeds along the banks are so dense that one cannot walk through them. The rains have been good and the fields are planted. Still, and as certainly as the thirstland blooms, drought will return and with it the conditions of the mission's existence and failure. It is then that awareness is strongest of the legacy of hardship and hope, industry, love and sorrow, the well of human experience that rises from the sandy soil like a spring. For, as we have said, there were those who came long ago to struggle out an existence in this place, and when the endeavour was ended they were gone and only the sun and wind remain.





*Livingstone Koloi and Esther Mulunga*



## Notes and Quotations

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1. Schapera, *David Livingstone Family Letters*, vol.i, p.31. Letter to sisters, 30 March 1841.
2. Dithubaruba is in the Dithejwane Hills (originally spelled *Lithubaruba* from French missionaries' use of Sotho-Tswana orthography). In the vicinity is the cave of Lepolole, now Logageng ("Place of the Cave"). To the north is the Hill of Molepolole ("The Curse be Lifted from Him", referring to an earlier *kgosi*), where the modern Kwenya capital is situated.
3. Mabotsa is approximately 200km northeast of Kuruman, near Zeerust in the Transvaal, and is now called Gopane.
4. Letter to D Watt, 27 Sept 1843. *David Livingstone: A Catalogue of Documents*, Letter 0089.
5. Chamberlin, p.76. Letter to Arthur Tidman, 2 Dec 1844.
6. Chamberlin, p.44. Letter to George Drummond, 21 Nov 1844.
7. On 9 January 1845, the Rev Prosper Lemue of the Paris Evangelical Society officiated at the Livingstone wedding, not Moffat.
8. Jeal, p.60. Hero worship and emphasis on the practicality of the marriage have so dominated the study of Livingstone that one scholar observed that when Livingstone went into the interior to convert the African, "marriage to Moffat's daughter did not stop him" (Shepperson, *Livingstone and the Years of Preparation, 1813-1857* in Pachai, p.9).
9. Letter to John H Parker, 11 May 1844. *DLCOD*, Number 0100.
10. Schapera, *DLFL*, i, pp.103,104. Letter to Mary Moffat, 1 Aug 1844.
11. Tshongwane is 64km north of Mabotsa and 15km east of the Botswana border at Ramotswa. On some maps, the site is designated "Sechele's *Oude Stad*". Livingstone rendered the name "Chonuane". He also wrote "*Bakwains*" for Bakwena.
12. Livingstone, *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa*, pp.16,17.
13. Schapera, *DLFL*, i, p.132. Letter to Moffat, 6 June 1845.
14. Healey (p.17) states that Robert was born in December of 1845; Dickson (p.140) that he was born on 9 January, 1846. Seaver remarks that no date was recorded. Guy (p.228) says that the birth took place at Tshongwane but no record was made and Schapera points out that the birth was intended to take place at Mabotsa. Weight is added to Schapera's position by the fact that Livingstone was still travelling between Mabotsa and Tshongwane in mid-January when it can be assumed that the child had been born, and Livingstone was returning to Mabotsa because his family was still there.
15. "And yet it is not their [the slaves] freedom that drives us to such lengths as their being placed on equal footing with Christians, contrary to the laws of God and the natural distinction of race and religion...; wherefore we rather withdraw in order to preserve our doctrines in purity." Anna Steenkamp on The Great Trek, instigated by brother Piet Retief.



16. Genesis 9:25.
17. Kolobeng is approximately 40km northwest of Tshongwane, 600km north-northeast of Kuruman, and 30km west of Gaborone in the Kweneng district of Botswana. It can be reached by the Gaborone-Thamaga road that passes south of Mogoditshane and north of Gabane, by-passing both villages. The road crosses the Kolobeng River about 100m west of the Livingstones' house, with a sign to guide visitors.
18. This incident occurred in about 1822, when followers led a conspiracy against Motswasele II for usurping the wives and cattle of his sub-chiefs. In the turmoil that ensued the Bakololo of Sebetwane made a bid for domination. Schapera vouches for Livingstone's version of the story (letter to Moffat, 4 May(?) 1849), *DLFL*, ii., p.44): the Bakololo (whom DL called Makololo) attacked, stealing cattle and scattering the Bakwena but spared Motswasele's children under orders from Sebetwane who gave Sechele the choice of remaining with him or finding his own subsistence. The young heir chose to remain in his country but praised his benefactor and maintained their relationship for many years.
19. Livingstone was accused by the Boers of having provided a cannon rather than a pot. For a full treatment of the incident and related issues, see Schapera, "The Story of Black Pot" in *David Livingstone South African Papers*, pp.21-48.
20. Livingstone, p.17.
21. Livingstone, p.23.
22. Livingstone, p.17.
23. Schapera, *DLFL*, i., p.118. Letter to Moffat, 12 May 1845.
24. Livingstone, pp.24,25.
25. Among other sources, there is an unpublished letter to Watt, 17 Jan 1847, in which Livingstone says, "I tell the *Bakwains* I shall not remain over 10 years, so they must improve now." *DLCOD*, Number 0160.
26. Blaikie, p.64.
27. Schapera, *DLFL*, i., p.211. Letter to R Moffat, Jr, 13 Aug 1847.
28. The method used was similar to wattle and daub. Livingstone's and Paul's huts are recorded as having measured 12 by 24 feet (3.6m by 7.2m); Mebalwe's, 12 by 16 feet (3.6m by 4.8m). Physical evidence of huts near and below the school/church suggests that Livingstone's teachers and the other Kuruman men may have built their houses there.
29. Schapera, *DLFL*, i., p.210. Letter to R Moffat, Jr, 13 Aug 1847.
30. Schapera, *DLFL*, i., p.212. Letter to Moffat, 29 Sept 1847.
31. In the soil of a farmer's field on the rise above the mission is a concentration of bottle fragments, iron and 19th C. English pottery. Assuming that Sechele and his wives possessed more foreign goods than other Bakwena, the chief's house and his *kgotla* were probably in this position. No foundations like those of the mission house have been located, however. Sechele's "European" house may not have been substantial.
32. Schapera, *DLFL*, i., p.237. Letter to Moffat, March(?) 1848.



33. Schapera, *DLFL*, i., p.212.
34. Letter to D Watt, 17 Jan 1847. *DLCOD*, Number 0160.
35. Schapera, *DLFL*, i., p.227.
36. Ransford, ... *Dark Interior*. Ransford's inaccuracies (e.g., his statement that there was no church at Kolobeng, p.43) do not detract from the importance of his thesis that Livingstone was "mildly deranged by a manic-depressive disorder". Other biographers noted Livingstone's mood swings, petty hatreds and lack of sympathy which Ransford elaborated to demonstrate the mental pattern of the *idée fixe* that led him away from Kolobeng and into exploration. He showed that Livingstone's bouts of depression were cyclical, and precipitated roughly every six months by stress such as delay or enforced celibacy. See Chapter Ten for what Campbell identified as Livingstone's worst "fit of Gaelic gloom" after the departure of his family, and his subsequent severe bout six months later.
37. Letter to Moffat, July/Aug 1847. *DLCOD*, Number 1075.
38. The incident is mentioned in various published letters and one that is unpublished, to Oswell, 10 April 1848 (*DLCOD*, Number 0184). Among oral traditions at Kolobeng is the story of the Kwenya child stolen at Dimawe by Boers who called him by the name of his owner, Plaatje. The boy, Keikgakile Seleka, became a valued cattle hand, but escaped and returned to his people, where he found occasional employment as an interpreter of Afrikaans for Sechele. Interview with E Mutsumanyane, Kumakwane, Kweneng, 30 Oct 1983.
39. The issue of African child labour on Boer farms has long been contentious and further complicated by the euphemistic rendering of *inboekselings* as "apprentices". "Indentured servants" is more accurate. The children were bonded, forced to work and prevented from returning to their people. If they escaped they were captured and returned. South African historian Tabler presented a defence by stating that only vagrant, orphan or destitute children and young unclaimed prisoners of Boer warfare against Africans were "apprenticed", and these children were fed, clothed and paid wages, making them better off than "the serfs of the Bechuana". Abuses of the system certainly existed, he conceded, but added that these were not widespread. (*The Far Interior*, p.206n).
40. Letter to Oswell, 10 April 1848. *DLCOD*, Number 0184.
41. The Livingstone dwelling was inaccurately described by Northcott as "a little homemade house" (p.24). Bakololo scouts were more apt in calling it a mountain with caves in it. Dimensions were never recorded, but the foundations compare in size to the Mabotsa house, the Moffat and Hamilton houses at Kuruman and the early settler houses of Port Elizabeth. Colonial and emigrant houses were built with hipped or gabled roofs. Livingstone's mention of a wall height of 11 feet (3.3m) could indicate a gabled end but probably refers to the high internal wall used to support the whole structure between *voorhuis* and bedroom. By any estimation, the house was formidable, and rose high above the plain. Livingstone recorded the length of his Tshongwane house in a



- letter to Moffat as 64 feet (19.2m). He undoubtedly intended to write 54 feet (16.2m), the dimension of both the earlier and later houses.
42. Livingstone, p.40.
  43. One is struck by the poor condition of the ruins at Kolobeng in comparison with those at Mabotsa. Even allowing for the crumbling nature of the soil, the ruins suggest a poor standard of construction in the Kolobeng buildings.
  44. Building materials were among the unrecorded details of Kolobeng, but raw bricks are evident in early photographs of the ruins and in excavation. A comment on bricks at Tshongwane by a Rev. Burns in 1934 (Botswana Secretariat File 175/3) substantiates Seaver's claim that the Tshongwane buildings were also made of mud bricks (p.162). Healey is in error in stating that all the mission buildings were constructed of stone (p.18).
  45. A section of the Kolobeng ruins that measures 10.7 feet by 11 feet (3.2m by 3.3m) relates to the kitchen. The foundations were not substantial and they abut the main house, indicating a lean-to structure of reed and mud built onto the main house later. Livingstone had said at Tshongwane: "As the wall will be much lower than that of the house, it will be little more trouble than the veranda would" (Schapera, *DLFL, i.*, pp.154,155. Letter to Moffat, 1 Nov 1845). While settlers normally depended on servants who cooked in a hut removed from the house, as at Mabotsa, Mary Moffat had insisted that her integral stonebuilt kitchen of 18 feet (5.4m) at Kuruman was ideal. Without a stone mason, however, Livingstone could not achieve this at Kolobeng, and exhaustion may have blunted his desire to build a substantial kitchen. It is clear from the letter quoted above that he intended a veranda, but as nothing remains to verify its existence, it is possible he did not build one. (Illustrations in this study indicating a veranda are artist's impressions).
  46. Beside the kitchen on the rear wall at the ruins the ground is uneven, and there are scattered stones and fragments of mud walls suggesting a lean-to of lighter construction than that of the kitchen. The room may answer the question of where the workshop was located that is mentioned in records of forced entry in 1852 (Chapter Nine). There is no evidence of a separate room for boxes, harnesses and tools, so this may also have served as a packhouse. Mary Moffat insisted that the store shed should adjoin the main house to secure property, as with the kitchen.
  47. Schapera, *Livingstone's Private Journals*, "Fragments of the Kolobeng Journal, 1848-9", p.297.
  48. Chamberlin, p.92. Letter to C. Whish, 9 Oct 1846.
  49. Schapera, *DLFL, i.*, p.161. Letter to Father, 17 Jan 1846.
  50. Schapera, *Livingstone's Missionary Correspondence*, pp.107,110. Letter to A. Tidman, 17 March 1844.
  51. Livingstone, p.20.
  52. Chamberlin, p.92.
  53. Schapera, *DLFL, i.*, p.200. Mary's postscript on Livingstone's letter to his mother, 4 May 1847. In a similar vein, Mary's sister-in-law, Emily Moffat,



- said her "so-called missionary life" was actually closer to that of a farmer's wife (letter to J S Unwin, 18 Nov 1860, in Wallis, *Matabele*).
54. Schapera, *DLFL, ii*, p.55. Letter to Charles (brother), 16 May 1849.
  55. While frequent childbirth may have been "women's lot" in the 19th C, Mary Livingstone's difficulties were exceptional due to extreme hardship and social isolation. Interpretation of Mary's ill health as psychosomatic (Healey, p.28) is speculative and unnecessary. Her headaches and "pains" were those of pregnancy, euphemistically described, in combination with exhaustion, poor diet and the diseases of Africa. (See Chapters Seven and Eight.)
  56. Schapera, *DLFL, ii*, p.134. Letter to sisters, 28 April 1851.
  57. In making a case for manic-depression in Livingstone, Ransford mentions the high incidence of the condition among members of the same family, and cites the psychological disorder of Charles Livingstone that was similar to but more overt than David's. With modern research into the genetic component of the disorder, there is also indication that Robert's aberrant behaviour manifested an inherited tendency to manic-depression.
  58. Letter to trustees of children's education, 16 March 1858. *DLCOD*, Number 0764.7.
  59. Details of the Linyanti Expedition of 1858 are recorded in Wallis, J. *The Matabele Mission* and Mackenzie, J. *Ten years North of the Orange River, 1858-1869*.
  60. Schapera, *DLFL, i*, p.246. Letter to parents, 5 July 1848.
  61. Letter to Joseph Moore, 9 Aug 1847. *DLCOD*, Number 0173.
  62. There are numerous written instances of early missionaries encouraging their children to form patronising, unequal relationships with African and Boer children. Mary's sister Bessie wrote of orphaned Boer children for whom she cared and sympathised, but expected her own children to keep their distance. Boer children were badly brought up or allowed to become too much like Africans, she believed. Missionaries thus inferred that "civilization" (62., cont.) was hierarchical, with those of European heritage bound by *noblesse oblige* and to maintain an example for the African. This explains Livingstone's consternation when Boer children at Tshongwane "ran among Paul's children as if equals" (Schapera, *DLFL, i*, p.213. Letter to Moffat, 29 Sept 1847). He was equally distressed when he noticed African influence on Europeans ("moral contagion", Chapter Nine).
  63. Schapera, *DLFL, i*, p.49n. Letter to father, 16 Dec 1843.
  64. Livingstone, p.40.
  65. Schapera, *DLFL, i*, p.236. Letter to Moffat, March(?) 1856.
  66. Schapera, *DLFL, ii*, p.290. Letter to parents, June 1856.
  67. Livingstone, pp.20,21.
  68. Schapera, *DLFL*, p.231. Letter to Moffat, Nov(?) 1847.
  69. Livingstone, p.16.



70. The boy, also called Tumagole, later became an evangelist—*moruti*—to his people.
71. This was the period of the first Tswana labour migrations. For years to come famine would precipitate an exodus to jobs in the south, and it would become commonplace for heads of households to be absent. The trend towards labour migration accelerated during the mining boom of the late 19th C.
72. Livingstone, p.23. Livingstone estimated that there were no more than 2 inches (5cm) of moisture in two years.
73. Schapera, *LPJ*, p.301. Journal entry for 27 Nov 1848.
74. Livingstone, p.24.
75. Chamberlin, p.129. Letter to Charles Livingstone, 16 May 1849.
76. Northcott's estimation of Sechele conflicts sharply: "Sechele, ... with his spontaneous piety and fearful attachment to Livingstone, is a prime example of a weakling Bechuana chief using the shield of the mission in the face of the threatening Boers." (p.32).
77. Schapera, *LPJ*, p.298.
78. Motshipi's case alone would end reasonably when she married Sechele's brother Basiamang.
79. There has been confusion over the wives. Schapera treats Mokgokong and Mma-Kgari as separate, while there is ample evidence that they are the same; Livingstone's comments on Mokgokong and Mma-Kgari appear to describe one woman and her circumstances. The author assumes one person. Ramsay sheds light on her background and the status of her marriage (p.67) by noting that Sechele was betrothed to her, a Mongwato, in his early years following his initiation among the Bangwato. Nevertheless, the first woman Sechele married was Kebalepile, whom his people favoured for seniority because she was Kwenā. When Kebalepile died giving birth to a daughter, Ope, her successor Selemang (a relative, though not a sister as custom required) was able to retain the position of senior wife. By this means Selemang became queen, and her son (Sebele) heir, though Mokgokong had been betrothed first, had married Sechele before Selemang's arrival and had been first to bear him a son (Kgari). Mokgokong was also Sechele's favourite, a fact which lends explanation to her determination to remain among the Bakwena and his persistence in an adulterous relationship with her (Chapter Six).
80. Schapera, *LPJ*, loc.cit.
81. Evidence from the site indicates that the Kwenā town was higher on the knoll above the mission, both to the northwest of the mission and over against Kolobeng Hill (see sketch map). The tributary running through the cleft of the hill provided a natural boundary between Kwenā and Kaa towns with the Bakaa to the east along the hill face. There is no record of the towns, but two references in contemporary sources help to confirm the locations. Livingstone described the Kaa refugee town as "opposite our house" (Schapera, *DLFL*, i, p.38. Letter to Janet [sister], 20 April 1849). Oswell remarked in the same year that the "native town



- stands in naked deformity on the side of and under a ridge of red iron sandstone". He apparently did not distinguish between the two towns as he saw them from the vantage point of the mission house (Oswell, p.195).
82. Letter to Benjamin Pyne, Dec, 1846. *DLCOD*, Number 0158.
  83. *The Cape Town Mail*, 26 April 1853. The substance of the article was communicated to the editor in 1851 or 1852 before it was submitted in writing. Article quoted and discussed in Schapera, *DLSAP*, Chap.2; this quotation, p.30.
  84. Schapera, *DLSAP*, p.32.
  85. Schapera, *DLSAP*, p.45.
  86. A number of Livingstone's contemporaries reported that the Boer game-hunting parties took children for labour on their farms. Artist Thomas Baines wrote that a Transvaal farmer hunting in the Lake Ngami region in the late 1860's acquired 15 children by trade, and led them away rather than fettering them because he knew that hunger would force them to follow his wagon (Wallis, *Southern African Diaries*). Adventurer Parker Gilmour (p.319) reported an incident in which missionary John Mackenzie wrested five malnourished Ngamiland children from Boer hands as late as the 1870's.
  87. As quoted by Livingstone and printed in British Parliamentary Papers, 1854:36, p.83 (IUP p.347).
  88. Schapera, *DLFL,ii.*, p.50. Letter to Charles Livingstone (brother), 16 May 1849.
  89. Chamberlin, p.109. Letter to Tidman, 17 March 1847.
  90. For details of Sechele's and Sebetwane's association, see Chapter Two, Note 18.
  91. A "forerunner" or "*voorlooper*" walked in front of the oxen to prevent them from veering. A driver, usually Khoisan, walked beside the wagon with a whip, but controlled the animals mainly by shouting and calling them by name.
  92. Distance was calculated by means of a trocheameter attached to the wheel of a wagon. Revolutions were multiplied by the circumference of the wheel.
  93. Quoted in Northcott, p.34. Northcott proposes that Livingstone had by this time formed a "strategy for Africa".
  94. Livingstone estimated that the Ngami was as much as 70 miles (112km) in circumference but no deeper than a few feet. The lake has expanded and contracted many times and is dry today.
  95. Schapera, *DLFL,ii.*, p.76. Letter to Agnes Livingstone (Sister), 5 Feb 1850.
  96. Details of the events of this period are taken from two unpublished letters, dated 29 Oct and 7 Nov, 1849, from Mary Moffat to her son John Smith, who was studying in Cape Town. Mss: National Archives of Zimbabwe. Mary Moffat referred in one letter to "slops", probably maize gruel, that her daughter gave the people to ease their hunger.



97. Oswell's biography states that Livingstone went ahead alone to Kolobeng, but Mary Moffat's letter, *Ibid*, 7 Nov 1849, reports that some Bakwena brought news to her that the two men arrived together.
98. Schapera, *DLFL,ii.*, p.67. Letter to parents, 25 Sept 1849.
99. The most conspicuous instance of Livingstone's failure to arrive and aid those waiting for him occurred in the Linyanti disaster cited in Chapter Four, Note 59.
100. "*The Peacemakers of the Interior of South Africa*", was signed "A Surgeon" and published in *The British Banner*, Vol.2 (1849), pp.420, 724.
101. Schapera, *DLFL,ii.*, p.74. Letter to Agnes (Sister), 5 Feb 1850.
102. Oswell, p.215. Letter to Louisa Cotton.
103. Livingstone's letter to his parents in October of 1851 (Schapera, *DLFL,ii.*, p.151) mentions that Wilson earned £500 Sterling from the 1849 expedition, and two other traders shortly afterwards realised £1,700. A trader's normal investment in trade goods such as beads did not exceed £150. One tusk that could be bought for a "handful of beads" or one musket could fetch £30 or £40. R Gordon Cumming (p.279) corroborates these figures in saying that on his first journey to the Bangwato he sold hundreds of muskets that he had bought at £20 per case of 16, and realised a profit of 3,000% after allowing for provisioning and other expenditures.
104. Wagons cost in rix dollars the equivalent of £40-80 sterling. Replacement wagon sails cost £10 per set. Ten to sixteen pairs of oxen totalling £40 or more were used for each wagon, and spare animals were needed. Travellers carried wagon spares, tools and animal forage, guns and powder, lead and tin for bullets. Consumable stores of coffee, tea, sugar, salt, preserved food, meal and flour had to be sufficient to compensate for pilfering and loss. Stores, tools and cooking equipment were packed into the wagon forechest (seat), sidechests, a trap under the wagonbox and net bags suspended beneath the sail.
105. Schapera, *LPJ*, p.301. 17 June 1853. Quoted in Blaikie (1903 edition), pp.118,119.
106. It was believed malaria was caused by "vapours" rising from rotting vegetation at the onset of the rains. The word means "bad air" (Italian). Livingstone elaborated the theory to include "marshy miasmata" as the source (Schapera, *DLFL,ii.*, p.83. Letter to Moffat, 8 July 1850). Association between African Fever, wet areas and the rains would prove correct, but only many years later on the Zambezi did Livingstone record a more cogent connection with mosquitoes. Forty years after the Kolobeng period the Scots physician Ross finally provided a complete explanation that identified the anopheles mosquito as carrier.
107. Livingstone eventually concocted a compound of 3 grains of quinine, 3 of calomel, 10 of rhubarb and 4 of essence of jalap with a little opium. The medication became known as "Livingston's Pills", reflecting the spelling he used for his name during his early years in Africa.



108. Letter of 9 Sept 1850 to Thomas Steele, *DLCOD Supplement*, Number 0235.1.
109. Letter of 3 Dec 1850 to Thomas Steele, *DLCOD Supplement*, Number 0239.9.
110. Schapera, *LMC*, p.152. Letter to Rev. J. Freeman, 24 Aug 1850.
111. Schapera. *DLFL,ii*, p.102. Letter to Moffat, 24 Aug 1850.
112. Schapera, *LMC*, p.152. Letter to Rev. J. Freeman, 24 Aug 1850.
113. Mary conceived her first child within weeks of her marriage; the second within a few months of the birth of the first. The third and fourth pregnancies began somewhat further apart, but the fifth only about a month after the death of the newborn fourth child. Mary miscarried in 1857, a few weeks after her husband's return to England, then conceived the sixth child almost immediately. There is indication that her fatal illness on the Zambezi in (113, cont.) 1862 was complicated by yet another pregnancy. Equalising various factors, it is clear that her fertility rate was higher than that of her mother who bore ten children. Modern research has shown that stocky build in women such as Mary is associated with an inhibited infertility mechanism during the lactation period.
114. Dimawe is north of Kanye, the Ngwaketse capital, near the present Manyana.
115. Schapera, *DLFL,ii*, p.90. Letter to Moffat, 8 July 1850.
116. The quotes are from Schapera (*DLFL,ii*, p.100. Letter to Moffat, 24 Aug 1850). Despite Livingstone's affectionate exaggeration about his daughter, his comments reflect a low birth weight that almost certainly resulted from the mother's malarial infection from the lake region that affected the placenta, even if the condition was asymptomatic. Inadequate subcutaneous fat in a neonate adversely affects body temperature control and increases susceptibility to infection; thus low birth weight is considered a high risk factor in neonatal mortality.
117. The antiquated procedure of "dry cupping" called for a piece of blotting paper soaked in spirit to be ignited on the skin near the site of the pain, and a tumbler placed over it. The object was to create an irritation that would dilate blood vessels and draw blood away from the infected area to relieve inflammation. Livingstone also treated Mary with "blister cupping" that caused blisters to draw fluid away from the site of pain. Pain was produced to relieve pain, and the benefit of either procedure was negligible.
118. The burial place of Elizabeth was difficult to confirm for my present study. In the early part of this century Mary's surviving brother J S Moffat and her youngest child Anna Mary Livingstone Wilson answered written queries about the location of the grave by saying they believed the little graveyard below the mission to be the child's resting place, though they may never have seen it. Kwena oral tradition recorded by a Protectorate administrator in 1916 lends credence to the current local belief that the one grave in the enclosure that has an "elliptical circle of stones very carefully arranged" is that of Elizabeth (Botswana Secretariat File S.175/1).



119. Chamberlin, pp.141. Letter to B Pyne, 4 Dec 1850.
120. Schapera, *DLFL,ii*, p.116. Letter to Parents, 4 Dec 1850.
121. Ransford cites Bell's Palsy as the cause of Mary's paralysis, and Healey concurs. Points against this diagnosis are that Bell's Palsy is rare and affects only the particular muscles of the face, whereas Livingstone stated that "the pain continually recurs and affects the right side and leg" (Chamberlin, pp.141. Letter to B. Pyne, 4 Dec, 1850). Huxley says paralysis resulted from a stroke, but does not suggest a cause. Toxaemia of pregnancy can lead to an eclamptic fit and stroke, but more plausible explanation can be found in the environment: cerebral malaria endemic in the Lake Ngami region through which Mary travelled. The *P. falciparum* parasite enters the liver and remains dormant until a period of low resistance or stress (e.g., exhaustion, poor diet, birth and the puerperium). Oedema develops in the brain, and then there is infarction (death of brain cells), pain and paralysis. In the worst cases cerebral malaria leads to profound shock and death.
122. Criticism came almost exclusively from Mary Moffat. Contemporaries and early biographers referred to the tragedy in the briefest terms, without mention of the circumstances that led to it. Livingstone, in the years after 1857, was lauded for his abilities and applauded for selflessness to the extent that even his brother-in-law John Smith Moffat, in his biography of the Moffats, described the Livingstones' journey of 1850 and its aftermath without mention of Elizabeth or her death. This was regardless of the fact that Livingstone had once written to him condolences on the death of his own child and made reference to the desolation he had felt at the loss of Elizabeth. Thus even the Moffat family, with a thorough knowledge of the determination in Livingstone's character that put others in jeopardy, quickly accepted him as the rising star of African exploration and no subject for the discussion of fallibility. Northcott is an example among Livingstone's biographers who followed this line and did not mention the baby's death. Jeal, in his highly critical study of Livingstone, reaches the opposite extreme by condemning Livingstone over the baby's death without acknowledging his deep sense of personal loss.
123. From the beginning of the crises of late 1850 until their resolution with removal to Kuruman Livingstone was reticent in his correspondence. He recalled without hesitation the death of the child in later years, but at the time he said little about it except to Moffat. He rarely mentioned Mary's incapacity or their other trials. To Steele he did not allude to his illness or their destitution, but wrote of his journey and the much-needed watch. To his parents he wrote, "Mary had a touch of paralysis" (Schapera, *DLFL,ii*, p.116. Letter to Parents, 4 Dec, 1850). Evasion may have been a factor in the silence and discrepancies, but so were grief and his own physical pain and debilitation.
124. *LMS Chronicle*, Feb 1861.
125. Cairns, p.120. Emily, wife of Moffat's son John, during the period of mounting the Linyanti Expedition, would raise an almost solitary voice in



- dispute of the wisdom of missionary expeditionary parties including women and children. See her letters in Wallis, J. *The Matabele Mission*.
126. Schapera, *LPJ*, pp.70,71. Journal entry for late September 1851, when Livingstone quoted Mary Moffat's May (or early April) letter to him. She, in turn, quoted her daughter's earlier letter.
  127. Schapera, *DLFL,ii*, p.135. Letter to Sisters, 28 April 1851.
  128. Schapera, *LPJ*, pp.70,71.
  129. Schapera, *DLFL,ii*, p.155. Letter to Moffat, 29 Nov 1851.
  130. Letter from Mary Moffat to her son John Smith Moffat, 7 Nov 1849, unpublished. MS: National Archives of Zimbabwe.
  131. Some of Livingstone's most prominent biographers, Seaver, Jeal and Campbell, have mistakenly assumed that Robert Moffat remonstrated against Livingstone along with his wife. MacNair correctly states that Mary Moffat spoke out alone.
  132. Schapera, *LPJ*, pp.70,71.
  133. A search party removed Dolman's remains 8km to Kolobeng for a Christian burial probably carried out by Paul or Mebalwe. For more information on the Dolman incident and its significance in the Livingstone period of Kolobeng, see J. Irving's edited diaries of Dolman, *In The Footsteps of Livingstone*.
  134. Schapera, *DLFL,i*, pp.82,83. Letter to Sister, 21 Aug 1843.
  135. Schapera, *LMC*, p.195. Letter to Tidman, 17 March 1852.
  136. Schapera, *LMC*, p.201. Letter to Tidman, 26 April 1852.
  137. Letter to Dyke, 1 Dec 1851, from Kolobeng. *DLCOD*, Number 0262.
  138. Schapera, *LMC*, p.190. Letter to Tidman, 17 Oct 1851.
  139. Schapera, *DLFL,ii*, p.139. Letter to Moffat, 29 Sept 1851.
  140. Schapera, *DLFL,ii, op.cit.*, p.155. The "taws": a slit thong formerly used for corporal punishment in Scottish schools.
  141. Livingstone chose the name Zouga but Mary vetoed it, though it is not clear whether she considered the name frivolous, obscure or unpronounceable. Livingstone then chose Charles after his brother and advised his parents of the decision, but abandoned that name also. William Oswell was the final choice and the boy was called "Oswell" and "Zouga".
  142. Ransford, like Healey (p.28), attributes Mary's physical problems to mental stress, saying that recurrence of her symptoms could be "confidently attributed to hysteria induced by Livingstone's decision to send her home" (p.68). The author of the present study takes the view that debilitation and malarial infection alone are sufficient to explain Mary's illnesses without recourse to psychosomatic causation (Chapter Four, Note 8). Her history of paralysis with childbirth in or after exposure to the lake regions made Livingstone expect recurrence in the present instance (Chapter Seven). The author, however, concedes the anxiety element in susceptibility. Mary would suffer two recurrences of paralysis in Britain where anxiety was a major element in her life, but the respiratory infections of winter probably touched them off (Chapter Ten).
  143. Schapera, *DLFL,ii*, p.139.
  144. Schapera, *DLFL,ii*, p.139.



- 145.Schapera, *LPJ*, p.78.
- 146.Matthew 10:14.
- 147.Jeal states (p.75) that the Kolobeng school was abandoned in late 1848 when Mary Livingstone withdrew from the teaching. In fact, Livingstone's two evangelists continued the teaching at Kolobeng and at Dimawe, where diligence and an end to hunger resulted in greater attendance than during Mary's time.
- 148.Schapera, *DLFL,ii*, p.172. Letter to Moffat, 2 April 1852.
- 149.Schapera, *DLFL,ii*, p.172. Letter to Moffat, 2 April 1852.
- 150.This and preceding quotation: Schapera, *DLFL,ii*, p.182. To Mary, 5 May 1852.
- 151.Schapera, *DLFL,ii*, p.183. Letter to Daughter, 18 May 1852.
- 152.Schapera, *LMC*, pp.201. Letter to Tidman, 26 April 1852.
- 153.Tabler, *James Chapman, Part 1*, p.82. Journal entry for 28 Oct 1852.
- 154.Edwards' testimony in Schapera, *DLSAP*, pp.139-40. Ramsay provides extensive verification for these numbers (p.97).
- 155.The looting and trial were described in Scholtz's report that eventually became the report to the Transvaal *Volksraad* following the incidents at Dimawe, but the mission involved was not named. Edwards' LMS report for that year confirms that it was his own mission, and makes the interesting point that property was stolen twice, first by two members of the commando identified as deserters from the British Army, and later by Boers. The court-martialled men were convicted, and asked to choose between thirty lashes or the loss of their "burgher rights" to any booty taken; they chose the latter.
- 156.Tabler, *Chapman, Part 1*, p.83. Journal entry for 28 Oct 1852.
- 157.In his statement to *The Cape Town Mail* Sechele said that 89 died, but this number probably included allies.
- 158.Sechele, Moffat, Edwards and Inglis gathered reports after the incident from informants, some of whom were Bakwena and others hunters, who counted non-Tswana grave mounds to corroborate an estimate of 25 to 30 dead on the Boer side. (Edwards' statement in Schapera, *DLSAP*, p.142.) Ramsay makes a case for the additional numbers being those of *baster* servants who acted as marksmen and were likely to have been buried as Boers (p.105n). If this is the case and the deaths of the auxiliaries are taken in addition, the total number of dead on the Boer side was high.
- 159.Livingstone arrived at 35 deaths by adding Boers he expected to have died of wounds to the estimated 30 graves cited by Griqua hunters and travellers at Dimawe. (*DLFL,ii*, p.185.) The rate of death from wounds was verified by Pretorius when he reported that his ensuing attack on the Barolong resulted in 3 men wounded who subsequently died.
- 160.All property described is mentioned in the Boer report, but the list was not exhaustive. Mebalwe, for instance, is known to have owned a wagon and to have lost everything he owned in the hostilities.
- 161.Historian Agar-Hamilton's report and evaluation of the Dimawe/Kolobeng incidents, which appears to have been based on the heavily



- biased official report cited here, influenced a generation of writers on the history of Southern Africa. He contended that the Boers “defeated and disarmed” the Bakwena, and that it was to their credit that they “did not subjugate” them or “levy tribute” (pp.147,148). Theal perpetuated the position by writing that after Dimawe Sechele had “given no trouble” (*History of South Africa*, p.46). Sillery, biographer and admirer of Sechele, unexpectedly took the same stance. It is the view of the author that Sechele was not defeated: he did not surrender or sue for peace; he and his territory did not come under the control of an occupying force; and he did not lose or relinquish all of his arms.
162. Schapera, *DLSAP*, p.158, corroborates the existence of rifles, based on the Transvaal Archive documents that suggest McCabe as the supplier, and five others reported to have been provided to the Bakwena at the end of May before the departure of the Bakwena from Kolobeng to Dimawe.
  163. Scholtz’s letter to Pretorius, which became the official report to the *Volksraad* of September, 1852. Translation from the original Dutch, quoted in Schapera, *DLSAP*, p.158.
  164. Tabler, *Chapman, Part 1*, p.83. Journal entry for 2 Nov 1852.
  165. Schapera, *DLSAP*, p.169. Moffat’s letter to Thompson, 20 Sept 1852.
  166. Tabler, *Chapman, Part 1*, p.83. Chapman’s remark about the dead on the ground is ambiguous. Tabler, editor of his journals, assumed he was referring to the scene at Kolobeng but exaggerated in reporting that there were dead at the mission. Agar-Hamilton took the view that Chapman meant to describe Dimawe where many bodies remained unburied. Livingstone apparently accepted that there were some dead at Kolobeng—Sechele’s Kgalagadi guards. A party of English hunters had gone north, Livingstone reported, and “when they came back to Kolobeng, found the skeletons of the guardians strewn all over the place” (Livingstone, p.45).
  167. Transvaal Archives Document R421/52, from Edwards to Scholtz, probably dated incorrectly: 11 August should probably read 11 September, since Chapman’s testimony (Tabler, *Chapman, Part 1*, p.84: Journal entry for 5 Nov, 1852) and other evidence date the sighting of the children during the commando’s withdrawal to Marico. Edwards wrote a further protest to the LMS that appeared as an article in a Bloemfontein newspaper read by the Transvaal authorities, who promptly expelled Edwards and Inglis.
  168. Tabler, *Chapman, Part 1*, p.84. Journal entry for 5 Nov 1852.
  169. In January 1852, Scholtz instructed Viljoen to join his war committee but documents show no further mention of Viljoen in the commando’s preparations. Transvaal Archives Document R362/52 and succeeding.
  170. Tabler, *Chapman, Part 1*, p.85.
  171. Deuteronomy 20:10-14.
  172. Schapera, *DLSAP*, p.145. Revised D L translation, Schapera, *LPJ*, pp.85-90.
  173. Schapera was of the opinion that Livingstone exaggerated the personal threat. See Chapter Two here for another instance of Livingstone’s apparent exaggeration of danger in a new undertaking.



174. Chamberlin, p.192. Letter to Tidman, 2 Nov 1852.
175. Chamberlin, p.183. Letter to Thompson, 12 Oct 1852.
176. Schapera, *LPJ*, p.96. Entry for 28 Dec 1852.
177. Schapera, *DLFL*, ii., pp.184-86. Letter to Mary, 20 Sept 1852.
178. Mary's letters to Tidman of Feb 1852 and 19 Oct 1853: LMS Archives, SOAS. The brevity and inarticulateness evident in these letters, which make up the bulk of Mary Livingstone's extant correspondence, contrast sharply with the length, frequency and expressiveness of her mother's letters.
179. Thomas suffered from haematuria (bleeding from the bladder), a condition which is often caused by the bilharzia fluke common in surface water in Africa. Though easily cured today, bilharzia used to debilitate the sufferer for life. Tom was unable to attend school, and Mary taught him for a time before hiring a tutor. Conjunctivitis (Agnes'), if severe and prolonged, can result in permanent damage to the eye.
180. Schapera, *Livingstone's African Journal, 1853-1856*, i., p.15.
181. Quoted in Blaikie, p.199.
182. Monk, p.24.
183. Wallis, *Matabele*, pp.42-44. Letter to John and Emily Moffat, 2 Oct 1858.
184. Letter to Robert, 31 May 1859. *DLCOD*, Number 0900.
185. See Chapter Four, Note 12, on the Matabele Expedition.
186. Mary's letter to son Thomas, 16 March 1862.
187. Journal, 31 May 1862, quoted in Blaikie, p.254; Ms, National Archives of Zimbabwe.
188. Livingstone had recently observed a relationship between mosquitoes and fever (Chapter Seven, Note 106), but during the same period, lost ground in the prevention of malaria. He had used quinine effectively as a prophylaxis in 1858, but gave it up the following year, apparently because of confidence in the curative effect of his "rousters" (the disease was "no danger to life") and an optimistic view of the healthful climate of the Shire Highlands.
189. Journal entry, quoted in Blaikie, p.300. Ms, National Archives of Zimbabwe.
190. Cairns, p.18.
191. Agnes's letter to Parents, 31 May 1862. Ms copy: N.L.S.
192. Through Robert Moffat, Agnes met and married (in 1875) Alexander Low Bruce of Scottish brewing wealth, who became a patron of exploration and a founding member of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society. He was prominent in Edinburgh business and politics, and they were hosts to numerous explorers. He chaired the African Lakes Corporation formed to support the two missions (Blantyre and Livingstonia) established in 1875 and 1876 as memorials to Livingstone in Nyasaland (now Malawi). One of their three children, Alexander Livingstone Bruce, owned tea and tobacco estates in Nyasaland (not to be confused with the ignominious William Jervis Livingstone, Manager of the Bruce Estates at the turn of the century). Agnes visited the then British Protectorate in 1909 to open the Henry Henderson Institute at



- Blantyre Mission. Among participants at the ceremony were two ageing slaves freed by her father and Mackenzie and a former bearer from among Livingstone's Bakololo who had settled and become a chief in the Shire Valley (Hetherwick, pp.17,18).
193. "May He accept my children for His service, and sanctify them for it!" Journal entry made at departure on the transcontinental journey, 8 November, 1853, quoted in Blaikie, p.127; MS, National Archives of Zimbabwe.
194. Anna Mary married Frank Wilson, a relative of the Braithwaites, who were her mother's and grandparents' longtime friends, and they worked with the (Anglican) Church Missionary Society in Sierra Leone. In later years Anna Mary travelled to what is now Zambia to visit her son and daughter serving at Chitambo near the place where their grandfather died. Chitambo was an outstation of the Livingstonia Free Church Mission, one of two missions established in Nyasaland, now Malawi, in memory of Livingstone.
195. Ransford (p.225) quoted Livingstone in his 5 Nov 1863 letter to Thomas Maclear as having said "a cousin accused me of being deficient in my duty to my children while engaged in this expedition" whereas the letter actually reads "my conscience accused me..." *DLCOD*, Number 1396. There has been so much controversy over Livingstone's conscience, or lack of it, that accuracy of transcription is crucial.
196. Letter to Kirk, 28 July 1864, in Foskett. Livingstone had followed the events and implications of the American Civil War even before his son was involved in it.
197. Quoted in Seaver, p.454. Ms: National Archives of Zimbabwe.
198. Letter to Sir Roderick Murchison, 2 Aug 1864. *DLCOD*, Number 1455.
199. Postscript dated 13 March in his letter to Agnes of Feb 1872. *DLCOD*, Number 2001. Blaikie erred in stating that Robert was buried at Gettysburg, apparently because Livingstone gave instructions for the transfer of his body there and did not learn that these had not been carried out. During the revival of interest in Robert around 1933 the Rev A M Chirgwin perpetuated the mistaken assumption and the related one (originated by Livingstone) that Robert died for a cause. Chirgwin essentially redrew Robert's character to bring it into line with that of his idealised father and "to rehabilitate the young man's reputation" because he had been considered a "scapegrace" (p.251, *Journal of African Society*, Jan 1934). The Rev E Smith (writer of *Aggrey of Africa*), corrected Chirgwin about the burial in a rebuttal in the same journal.
200. Quoted in Blaikie, p.97.
201. Letter to William Cotton Oswell, 8 July 1868, in Oswell, p.102.
202. Oswell's letter to Agnes, Oswell, ii., p.133.
203. After leaving Livingstone Stanley organised a caravan to return with supplies, and it was as the sole European member of this party that Livingstone's son William Oswell sought to join his father after the RGS expedition was disbanded. Dr John Kirk, then Consul at Zanzibar, dissuaded the young man on the grounds of his debilitation from



dysentery and a bladder disorder and because the route was wet and malarial. (*Proceedings, Royal Geographical Society*, Vol.16 (1871-72), pp.158-63, 372, 413 sqq, 424-5, 431, 436.)

204.Northcott, p.15.

205.Paraphrase and quotation here and the two preceding paragraphs are from Kgosiidintsi's monologue recorded by Moffat and published in Wallis (Ed.), *Matabele*, Vol.1, pp.377, 378.

206.In at least one instance there was clear justification for Moffat's condemnation of Sechele. During his interference in Ngwato politics Sechele ordered a man called Tshukudu to be murdered, and went off to lead family worship—according to Roger Price, who arrived on the scene shortly afterwards. Leyland also noted a return of "barbarous practices" after Livingstone's departure. Leyland's criticisms were tempered by mentioning that the Tswana evangelist had minimised the return to heathenism, and pointed out that rain rituals and other rites had never actually been curtailed during Livingstone's time but only driven into concealment. Persistence of *gofetlha pula* (the rain ritual) as late as 1920, on a farm at Kolobeng, was documented by Schapera.

207.Coetzee's letter to the Commandant General, 24 Oct 1856. Ms: Transvaal Archives. In his appeal for a missionary, Sechele found an advocate in J. Coetzee, who seems to have been a Boer farmer of Sechele's acquaintance who could write the necessary Afrikaans to Pretorius. The letter bears the unmistakeable stamp of Sechele's manipulation—describing him as God-fearing and dedicated to peace. He had no *predikant*, it lamented, yet he persevered in preaching and building a church and he was determinedly tracking down the murderers of a Boer hunter.

208.After Dimawe Sechele re-accumulated livestock until he eventually had 1,000 head of cattle and 100 sheep. As Bessie Price pointed out, however, this was meagre in terms of the wealth traditionally associated with a chief; his extravagance lay in things European. He had paid £300 in feathers and skins for one of his earlier houses, well over Livingstone's expenditure of £25, and subsequent houses were all more lavish. He pleaded successfully with Bessie Price for a Setswana New Testament and matching hymnbook, bound in red morocco, that had been given to her by her mother. He received other impressive Bibles and keepsakes from various people, and in some instances used them for trade.

209.Interviews with Esther (*Mma-Elizabeth*) Mulunga, 30 Oct and 20 Nov 1983 and J Koloi, 9, 23 and 30 Sept 1983 at Kumakwane, Kweneng.

210.Botswana Archive Documents S.175/1-4, paraphrased. Regarding Sechele's grandson: Sechele II succeeded Sebele, who in turn was succeeded by Sebele II in 1917. The role and equilibrium of the *kgosi* deteriorated thereafter, and Sebele II was removed by the Protectorate Administration in 1931.



## Chronology

1841	March	David Livingstone arrives Cape Town
	July	Reaches Kuruman
	Late year	First journey from Kuruman
1842	February	Second journey
1843	Mid-year	Third journey; decision to begin Mabotsa
1844	January	Meets Moffats at Vaal River
	February	Attacked by lion
	July	Kuruman convalescence; betrothal
1845	January	Marriage; homestead at Mabotsa
	May	Dispute with Edwards
	August	Beginnings at Tshongwane
1846	January	Birth of Robert
	February	Removal to Tshongwane
	May	Garden at Kolobeng
	Mid-year	Journey eastward
	November	Return eastward with family
1847	March	To Kuruman
	May	Birth of Agnes
	August	Beginning at Kolobeng
	September	Family's removal to Kolobeng
1848	February	Journey eastward with Paul and Sechele
	March	Permanent house at Kolobeng
	October	Baptism of Sechele
	December	Final journey east with Paul
1849	January	Boer demand for Livingstone's recall; threat of attack
	March	Birth of Thomas Steele
	April	Sechele banned; Bakaa arrive; family to Kuruman
	June	Livingstone, Oswell, Murray go north
	August	Mary, children return to Kolobeng alone; expedition reaches Ngami
	October	Livingstone reaches Kolobeng
	December	Freeman and Moffat visit Kolobeng
	April	Second journey north, with family
	End July	Retreat to Kolobeng
	Early August	Birth of Elizabeth; Mary's stroke
1850	September	Death of Elizabeth
	November	Evacuation to Kuruman



1851	February	Return to Kolobeng
	April	Third journey with family; Oswell; Livingstone abandons Bakwena
	July	Death of Sebetwane; to Upper Zambesi; decision to send family away; Bakwena remove to Dimawe
	September	Dolman with Livingstones on Boteti; birth of William Oswell
	November	Livingstones return to Kolobeng
	December	Departure for Cape; death of Dolman
1852	January	Boer preparation for war; Sand River Convention
	March	Livingstones' arrival at Cape
	April	Family embarks for England; Scholtz summons chiefs
	August	Livingstone's arrival at Kuruman; commando attack on Bakwena; Boer patrol at Kolobeng
	October	Chapman at Kolobeng and Dithubaruba
	December	Livingstone meets Sechele; leaves Kuruman
1853	January	Livingstone at Dithubaruba
	June	Arrives Linyanti
	November	Departs Linyanti
	December	Mary's illness and breakdown in England
1854		Livingstone reaches west coast, turns east
1856		Livingstone reaches east coast; departs for England; family reunited
1857		Livingstone resigns from LMS; Cambridge lectures; Universities Mission
1858		Livingstone, Mary, William Oswell embark; birth of Anna M; Mary returns to England; Sechele receives Lutheran missionaries
1861		Livingstone and Mary reunited on Zambesi
1862		Death of Mary Livingstone
1864		Death of Robert; Sechele expels Lutherans
1872		Death of David Livingstone
1885		Bechuanaland Protectorate formed
1892		Death of Kgosi Sechele



## Glossary and Biographical Notes

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- Afrikaans - language and culture of the migrants of the Great Trek and their descendants derived primarily from Dutch but also German, French, Portuguese, English, Malay, Khoisan and Bantu. The new African/European culture was shared by coloured and white, yet divided them by consciousness of racial difference. *Afrikaner* (speaker)/ *Afrikanerdom* (anglicised noun: society or locale).
- assegai - short-handled spear used by various peoples of southern Africa, by the Batswana since 18th C (Arabic).
- badimo - ancestor spirit guardians (Setswana).
- Bakgatla-baga-Mmanaana - Bakgatla of the Nnaana, a red/white cow significant in tradition; see *Kgatla*.
- Bakwena-baga-Kgabo - Bakwena who had been followers of Kgabo; see *Kwena*.
- Balala - thirstland people of Khoisan ancestry now frequently intermarried with Bantu, particularly Makgalagadi, and speaking Kgalagadi dialects, though the !xo language remains extant in the western Kalahari. During the last century, they were treated as serfs.
- bastard/baster - one of mixed race, particularly of white immigrants and indigenous peoples (Afrikaans); term for one group, of predominantly Khoi origin, gave way to *Griqua* under missionary influence in the early 18th C.
- Boers - “farmers” (Afrikaans); southern African farmers of European origin who developed a distinct culture and language with strong Dutch influence. Most were Calvinists from Holland and France or Lutherans from Germany and many of these sectarian refugees. They came in the late 17th C. to work for officials of the Netherlands East India Company on estates in the Cape. All employed were required to speak Dutch so national identities were lost, the language evolved into Afrikaans, and the people into “Boers” (claiming white racial purity) and “Afrikaners” (for all who used the language). African and Asian slaves were common from the early days of the East India Company and a large population of mixed race was produced whose mother tongue was Afrikaans. *Afrikaner* gradually replaced *Boer*.
- bogadi - bride wealth provided to the bride's family to legitimise children of the union into the father's family (Setswana).
- brandvas - a protection against fire.
- bogosi - nation, chiefship (Setswana).
- bogwera/bojale - male and female initiation rights (Setswana).
- bushveld - uninhabited savanna or grazing lands; (from Afrikaans *bosveld*).
- dagga - marijuana (*cannabis sativa*) (Afrikaans).
- dibeela - evil charms (Setswana).



- difaqane - series of disastrous wars fomented in the late 18th C. and set off west of the Drakensbergs in 1821 which resulted in upheaval and a ripple effect on Tswana and other nations. Non-militant peoples were made refugees and then marauders. As an indirect result, Tswana kingship changed: the importance of seniority gave way to strength of personality, diplomacy, wealth and ability to wage war. Sechele, dynamic and respected for his strength, was an example of the new leadership.
- dopper - pertaining to members of a Dutch Reformed Church sect. Their dress was characterised by short, drab trousers, a jacket with oversized buttonholes, and a wide-brimmed hat; one of that group.
- drift - ford over a stream; (from Afrikaans *drif*).
- Fokeng - pertaining to a group of Sotho origin located at the time of this study in the Western Transvaal; sing. *Mofokeng* / pl. *Bafokeng*.
- fountain - a spring, the source of which was called "the eye".
- freebooter - usurper; one who takes what he wants.
- go fetlha pula - literally, to stir medicine into a white froth resembling clouds; thus a sympathetic magic for rain (Setswana).
- gopo - trap for large numbers of game animals involving a pit and hedge of brush (Setswana).
- Griqua - Pertaining to a racially mixed, predominantly Khoi group of Afrikaans language and culture who established chiefships, and left a nomadic life under missionary influence at the end of the 18th C. to settle along the Orange River in present Griqualand West and western Orange Free State; member(s) of that group; pl. *Griqua* or *Griquas* (anglicised).
- Hottentot - See *Khoi* peoples.
- Hurutshe - pertaining to a Tswana group to whom the missionary Walter Inglis ministered; centred around present Rustenburg; *Mohurutshe* / *Bahurutshe*.
- inboekseling - captive, indentured servant of Boers (Afrikaans).
- Kaa - pertaining to a Tswana group of central Botswana who were subjugated by the Bangwato but escaped to Sechele's protection in 1848; *Mokaa* / *Bakaa*.
- Kaffir - in the vocabulary of the early immigrants to South Africa, originally a member of the Amakhosa, then of the Bantu in general; now considered pejorative; (from Arabic *kaffir* ["infidel"] via Afrikaans).
- kaross - cloak of skins sewn with sinews; main item of traditional Setswana clothing.
- Kgalagadi - a number of related groups rather than a single group, mainly living in the Kalahari, who speak dialects of a language similar to (not necessarily mutually intelligible with) Setswana and Sesotho; *Mokgalagadi* / *Bakgalagadi* / *Makgalagadi*.
- Kgatla - pertaining to a Tswana group of southern Botswana and the Western Transvaal, for a section of whom (the Bakgatla-baga-Mmanaana) Edwards was missionary; *Mokgatla* / *Bakgatla*.
- kgosana - chief of lesser rank (Setswana).



kgosi - chief; pl. *dikgosi* (Setswana).

kgosing - home of the Chief (Setswana).

kgotla - area between huts in a Tswana village set aside for gatherings, the major one being near the chief's huts for meetings and court cases (Setswana).

Khoi peoples or Khoisan - ethno-linguistic group nomadic in southern Africa from the Stone Age until recent times. Survivors include "Hottentots" and "Bushmen"; *Masarwa* (Setswana).

kloof - cleft in rocks, sharp depression (Afrikaans).

Kololo - pertaining to a large tribe of the Zambesi region which has integrated with others or disappeared. After employment on Livingstone's transcontinental expedition, some settled in the Lower Shire and established chiefdoms among the local people; *Lekololo / Makololo, Mokololo / Bakololo*.

kopje - small, round hill rising out of relatively flat ground (Afrikaans).

kraal - protected enclosure, especially cattle; general, an African village (Afrikaans).

krijgsraad - war council (Dutch).

Kwena - "crocodile"; pertaining to one Tswana group for which the crocodile is the totem, now located mainly in Kweneng District in Botswana; Livingstone was their missionary; *Mokwena / Bakwena; Sekwena* ([with] the language or characteristics of the Bakwena). Livingstone referred to them as "the Bakwains".

laager - circular cordon of wagons for protection of people and cattle against attack; in laager - enclosed in a laager, in camp, secured (Afrikaans).

Landrost - High court of the South African Republic magistrate (Dutch).

letshotelo - dry cow dung traditionally used for bathing (Setswana).

Leburu / Maburu - Setswana form of Boer / Boers.

Lekgowa / Makgowa - Setswana term for white people other than Afrikaners.

lekoma - traditional method of hut construction using mud (Setswana).

lemena / mamena - camouflaged pitfall for trapping game (Setswana).

Letsholathebe - Chief of the Batawana contacted by Livingstone.

lolwapa - low-walled enclosure forming courtyard around house; pl. *malwapa* (Setswana).

makatane - edible melons of Kalahari Desert region; variant: *tsamma* (Setswana).

Mambari - former slaves or descendants of slaves who acted as agents for white slavers (Arabic).

Mapela - pertaining to a Tswana group of the Transvaal; *Momapela / Bamapela*.

Mebalwe - Mebalwe of the Tshwena group of Bakgalagadi who settled near Kuruman. Baptised by Livingstone; became deacon; "native teacher" under Livingstone 1845-52, and remained with the Bakwena for years afterwards; with John Smith Moffat among the Amandebele in 1863; last record of him at Kuruman in the 1880's.



Mma-Mary - "Mother of Mary" Setswana name given a person whose first born child is Mary; Mary Moffat was Mma-Mary; Mary Livingstone, Mma-Robert. A man is renamed similarly: Robert Moffat was Rra-Mary; Livingstone, Rra-Robert. (Livingstone's spellings were *Ma-* and *Ra-*).

Mma-Sebele - chief wife of Sechele and mother of Sebele, her firstborn, who became chief. Her birth name was Selemeng.

Modimo - the high god (Setswana).

Mokgatle - Fokeng chief whose people settled near present Rustenburg in the Transvaal during Livingstone's tenure with the Bakwena and who were brought under Boer control.

monare - Setswana corruption of Afrikaans *Myneer* ("Mister").

mopane - low, leafy tree of southern Africa.

morafe - state, tribal group (Setswana).

morula - hardy tree native to Botswana with edible fruit.

moruti - teacher; came also to be applied to a preacher, minister (Setswana).

Moshoeshoe - Sotho chief during the mid-19th C., known for the hegemony he established against the Boers.

Mosielele - chief of the Bakgatla-baga-Mmanaana at Mabotsa. Came under attack at Dimawe with the Bakwena and then took his people to Sechele's bogosi.

motse - town; pl. *metse* (Setswana).

muid - measure of grain, especially maize or sorghum: about 3 bushels or 200 pounds (90kg); a bag of this amount; from Afrikaans *mud*.

Mzilikazi - notorious and terrifying chief of the Amandebele during the mid-19th C. (Setswana form *Moselekatse*).

Ndebele - pertaining to the Nguni tribe that fled north from the Zulus of Shaka, became strong and fierce warriors, and eventually settled in present Zimbabwe; *Letebele* / *Matebele* or *Amandebele*; adj. and noun often *Ndebele*.

ngaka - diviner or sorcerer; applied loosely, European doctor of medicine (Setswana).

Ngwaketse - pertaining to a Tswana group of southern Botswana; *Mongwaketse* / *Bangwaketse*.

Ngwato - pertaining to a Tswana group of central Botswana; *Mongwato* / *Bangwato* (*Bamangwato*); *Gangwato*: country of the Bangwato.

Oswell, William Cotton - English gentleman; with British Army in India; in southern Africa for hunting and adventure; became Livingstone's closest friend.

Paul - Early convert at Kuruman from the Batsatsing who were known for their adornments; in middle age, Tswana assistant under Livingstone; continued into old age with the LMS among the Bakwena at Logageng, later with the Bangwato at Shoshong.

pit - shallow well dug (usually in a riverbed) to obtain water by seepage.

pitfall - See *lemena*.

pitso - Tswana public meeting, usually political (Setswana).



Potgieter, Andries Hendrik - *voortrekker* leader who brought a large group across the Orange River in 1836. Most were relatives, as he married four times and had many children. Founder of Potchefstroom, he became one of four commandant generals of the loosely assembled South African Republic begun in the Transvaal in 1849.

predikant - Christian minister or preacher (Afrikaans).

Pretorius, Johannes - farmer of Magaliesberg; friend of Livingstone.

Pretorius, Andries Willem Jacobus - prominent *voortrekker*; successfully led his people against Zulu Dingane; rival of Potgieter; seized overall authority by negotiating alone with the British at Sand River 1852; Commandant General South African Republic; active in attempts to disarm Sechele and Mosielele.

pula - rain (Setswana).

rix dollar - currency which originated in the Cape Colony and, after withdrawal in 1841, continued to be used in the interior, especially among the Boers.

rock rabbit - the hyrax, a small animal which lives among rocks.

Rolong - pertaining to Tswana group around Mafikeng;  
*Morolong / Barolong*.

Sarwa - pertaining to hunter-gatherers of the Kalahari who are Khoi-speaking, commonly known as Bushmen; *Mosarwa / Masarwa* or *Basarwa* (Setswana).

Sebetwane - Patsa-Fokeng Chief until 1851; formidable force in *difaqane* 1820's; driven with his people westward, they overran Dithakong/Kuruman; migrated northward; absorbed various peoples; became known as Bakololo; settled in Chobe area. Kingdom fell in 1864.

Sechele - Kwenia chief during the mid and late 19th C. whose missionary was Livingstone and whose heir was Sebele.

Sekgoma I - Ngwato chief during the mid 19th C. He was the father of Khama, the well-known Christian chief.

Sentufe - chief of Bangwaketse at Kanye; had Tswana teacher, Sebube, from Kuruman. Both were driven out by the Boers at the time of the Dimawe attack.

setlagana - a cleared space around which branches are placed, used chiefly as a protected enclosure for herds.

Setswana - characteristic of the Batswana people of southern Africa; their language which is in the Bantu family.

Shona - pertaining to a number of linguistically related, non-Tswana groups living in what is now southern Zimbabwe; *Leshona / Mashona*.

smouse - itinerant trader with wagon and team; "pack peddler" with donkeys (from Dutch *smous* - a Jewish peddler).

span - pair; also team; *inspan / inspan*: to yoke oxen or depart by wagon; *outspan / uitspan*: to unyoke or cease wagon travel; a place for unyoking (Afrikaans).

Steele, Thomas - officer in the Coldstream Guards in India; sportsman/adventurer who befriended Livingstone on hunting expedition from Kuruman 1843.



Suwe - chief of the Bakaa during the mid-19th C.

tala - green; corrupt (Setswana).

tau - lion (Setswana).

Tawana - pertaining to a Tswana group near Lake Ngami;  
*Motawana / Batawana*.

thupa - indigenous whip of animal hide.

Tlharo - chiefdom near the Batlhaping; *Motlharo / Batlharo*.

Tlhaping - pertaining to a Tswana group living near Kuruman during Moffat's time; *Motlhaping / Batlhaping*.

totem - *sereto* (Setswana): an animal adopted as a tribal symbol and revered in various ways; eg, taboo prevented an individual from gazing at any animal of his people's totem when he chanced upon it in the wild.

trek - to travel by (or a journey by) ox wagon (Afrikaans); trekboers - descendants of earliest South Africa settlers who moved their farms when the soil was wore out; the Great Trek (migration) northward of about 20,000 people in waves during the 1820's and '30's which resulted in 1) settlement of areas out of reach of British authority in the Cape, 2) absorption of land left in confusion after the Difaqane conflicts, and 3) establishment of a culture which excluded non-whites from ownership, authority and status.

tshega and lokgabe - male and female versions of traditional Tswana bead apron worn to cover the genitals. The apron was and occasionally still is worn alone for work; a kaross is added at other times. It hangs to mid-thigh on adults, but is shorter for a child.

Tswana - pertaining to a large nation of related peoples of southern Africa, the ruling lineages of which can be traced to the Witwatersrand of the 13th C. The most common spelling during the 19th C was *Chuana*, hence *Mochuana / Bechuana*, and this was the form adopted by the administrators of both British Bechuanaland and the Bechuanaland Protectorate. The correct current spelling is *Tswana / Motswana / Batswana / Botswana*. It is a legacy of the migrations, wars and settlements in the period of this study that a national border divides the homeland of the Batswana, more of them living in the Republic of South Africa than live in Botswana.

uitspan - area in which oxen can be unyoked and wagons unloaded (Afrikaans).

ulendo - to travel; a journey (Chichewa); *ulendos* (anglicised pl.).

veld - grassland (Afrikaans).

Volksraad(Raad) - legislative council of the South African Republic (Dutch).

voorhuis - parlour or main room of a house (Afrikaans).

voortrekkers - Afrikaners (coloured and white) who journeyed across the Orange and Vaal Rivers in the Great Trek; similarly, "trekboers" "trekkers", and "cattleboers".

Yeí - pertaining to the people of the Lake Ngami and river region of northern Botswana; *Moyei / Bayeyi*.



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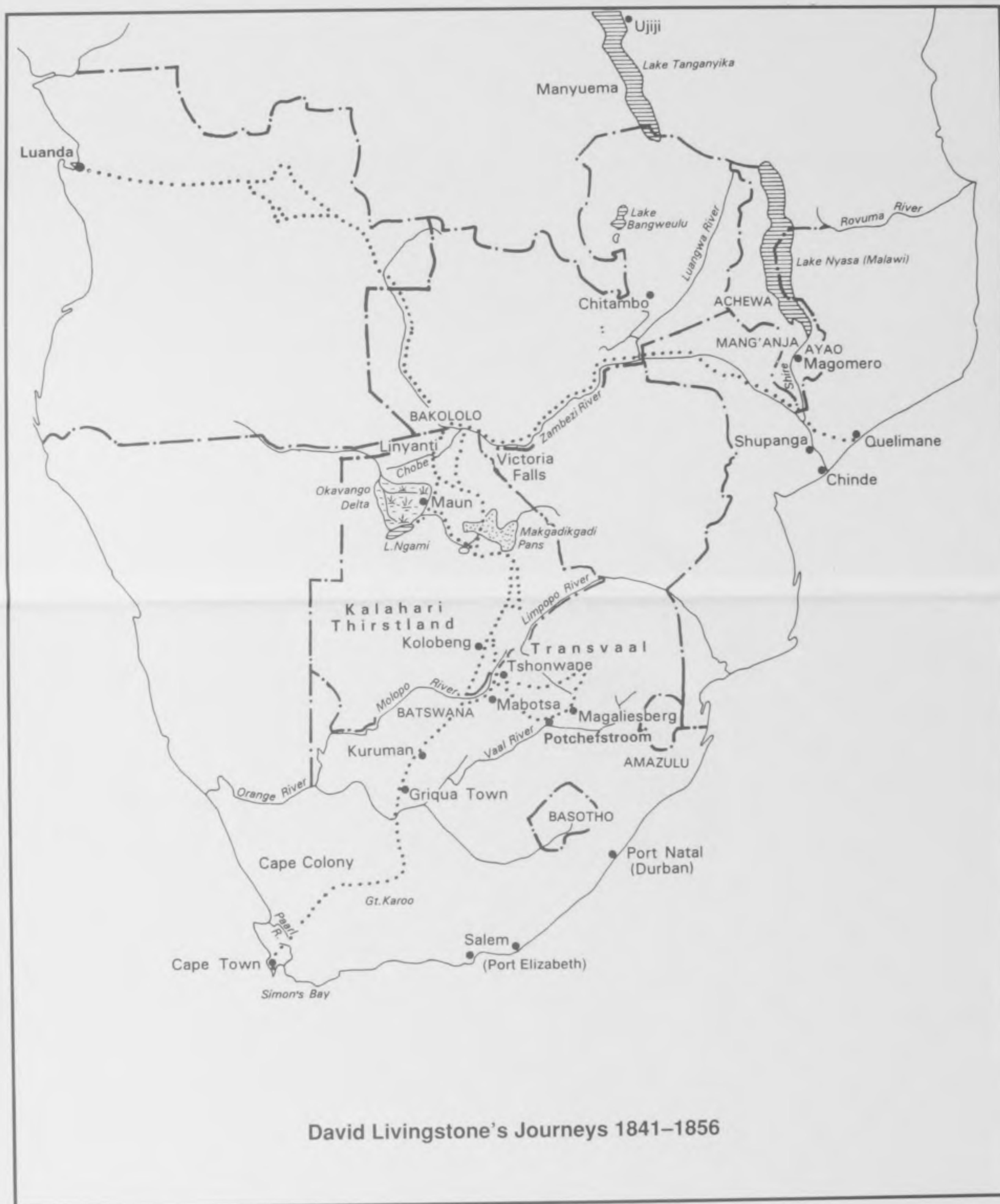
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David Livingstone's Journeys 1841-1856



The bookcover front depicts David Livingstone with his family and the house under construction at Kolobeng. The back shows the first service in the unfinished church, the Tswana evangelist Mebalwe and the Kwena people.

Drawings are by Mariette van Velden and Gillian Manning; cover design by Imray, Laurie, Norie & Wilson Ltd, St Ives, Cambridgeshire. Maps within are by Birneck Makweti of the Botswana Department of Environmental Science.



# The Livingstones at Kolobeng 1847-1852

Janet Wagner Parsons

In 1847 an unknown missionary – David Livingstone – began a simple house on the bank of the Kolobeng River. His mission became the centrepiece and the point of departure for the man who would become the nineteenth century's greatest explorer, the family that travelled with him and the people of Chief Sechele of the Bakwena.

The house is also the centrepiece for Janet Parsons' study of 'the Kolobeng years' that brings to light material previously overlooked or little used. Livingstone, she maintains, was as flawed as he was remarkable; his wife Mary as remarkable as she was plain and simple.

Nearly a hundred titles have appeared on Livingstone. None has highlighted the family he abandoned. None has perceived the misery and devotion of the wife who returned to him only to die on the Zambesi.

No book until now has examined Livingstone's responsibility for the quarrel that arose between himself and the Afrikaners. None has credited Sechele with a statesmanship that built – at Kolobeng – the foundations of modern Botswana.

The study is pivotal, its conclusions significant. The narrative engages the reader in a nineteenth century journey across the Kalahari into an era and an environment so arid it is almost indescribable. Yet the writer evokes the desolation and calls forth the pathos of those who lived four brief years at Kolobeng. Their enterprise on the banks of the Kolobeng ended, evangelism yielded to exploration, and they went their separate ways, changed forever by events and the mind of David Livingstone.



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